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OR,

## High Old Times at Hard Pan.

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UP," "FRESH FRANK," "DOUBLESNOT  
DAVE," "PINNACLE PETE," ETC.

### CHAPTER I.

#### HURRAH HARRY MEETS A FRIEND.

"HELLO, sport! Anything serious the matter? You look as though the Good Samaritan might have a heap of fun if he came your way. If I can help you out say the word. I've been in a pinch myself, and know how it is."

Two horsemen coming along the road that led from Hard Pan, and at a distance of seven or eight miles out, came upon a fellow sitting by the side of the trail. He had humped himself, so to speak, for meditation; and from appearances it did not seem likely that his thoughts could be of the most agreeable kind.

He was tall, and his face was handsome enough, as it was turned upon the two intruders upon his deliberations; but he was travel-worn and in something very like rags. Some bruises

THROWING THE GIRL, OR GIRL-WOMAN, OVER HIS SHOULDER, HURRAH HARRY SLOWLY, BUT SURELY, WON HIS WAY UPWARD.



were visible on his face, that looked as though they might be some days old, but his eyes were bright, and his smile was cheerful enough, as he laughingly answered:

"Thanks, but I guess I can worry along until the run changes. I'm dead broke, flat busted, cleaned out, no money, hard up, away from home and no grub. That is all there is of it. Nothing wrong with my health, and spirits couldn't be better. I allow that for looks I might put on a heap more of style and still not be a dude, but under the circumstances I'm just about level all over."

"Glad to hear it. I thought you looked as though the whole earth had moved on, and you had been left. How did it all happen? You don't appear like a man who lives on wind as a regular diet."

"Oh, it was a gang, a regular gang, that caught me asleep, and had me roped before I had time to lay out more than two or three of them. I don't know whether there is a mark there or not—I haven't had the chance or the courage to look in a glass since—but I think there ought to be."

He held his head sideways as he spoke, and pointed at his neck, especially under his ear. The suggestion was that a rope had been there at a time not very far distant.

"And what had you been doing?"

"Cleaning out the best men of Halcyon in a little, friendly contest at draw. My luck beat their advantages and they couldn't understand it. If I ever give away a chance again you can have my hat! When they kicked some of them dropped; but, that was all in the game. What in happy Heaven had the rest of the camp to do with it? I had three or four thousand to give me a starter when I got to Hard Pan, and of course they got that. Then they tried me on the charge of self-defense—and, here I am."

"Hard Pan is not exactly the place for a busted sport to go to; and if you show up there in that rig they will mob you before you get to going. Better turn back, sport. If it was only money, now, I might give you a starter; but for clothes—you and I are not of the same bigness. You think you could hit Hard Pan hard?"

"Thanks, but I can stand pat, and rake the pot on pure cheek; though it's not likely I'll captivate many female hearts in such a rig as this. Well, that will be a blessed rest—if it don't last too long. And then, there is a grip of mine floating around somewhere that will set me straight as a stick if it catches me there. Oh, I'll make out all right. I always do."

"I like your grit, old man, and I don't like the festive burg you are going to, worth a cent. Come, now, what's the matter with my giving you a grub stake, and when you make your clean up, at the end of the racket, you can remember I'm your pard? How much shall it be?"

"Thanks. I see that you are a gentleman from the ground up. It's a fair offer, and I'll take it the same way it's made."

The sport's manner changed; he rose to his feet, and looked more sharply at the individual who had made him the unexpected offer.

"Show your good sense. About how much is it going to take to set you in fair running order?"

"Anywhere from a hundred to a thousand. The more I have the louder I'll howl when I get there."

"A thousand goes, then; and don't be afraid to use it. What's the name of my generous debtor, and about what time will you expect me to call for dividends?"

"The size of the camp is the limit to the length of operations. It took about a week to do for Halcyon; in Hard Pan there is a little more room. Call around in about three weeks and I'll be ready with a payment on account. If you ask for Hurrah Harry, the High Horse from Halcyon, by that time the sports around town will know who you mean."

The stranger who had made the remarkable proposition was evidently in solid earnest. He drew out a thick wallet, and proceeded to leisurely count out the larger amount named by Hurrah Harry, which he extended without flourish or hesitation.

"There you have it. Be good to yourself, and I hope I will be able to see you later. If I don't, my share in the spoils can be donated—say in a year—to the Foreign Missionary Society, or any other good cause. So long."

With a courteous wave of his hand the confiding donor clucked lightly to his horse, and he and his companion moved off at a stiff canter.

One of the two had not spoken a word during the colloquy. He was tall, dark of face and hair, and heavily bearded. He preserved his silence until fully out of the hearing of the sport, who had again dropped leisurely on the turf by the side of the trail. Then he spoke, in a tone that was harsh and stern—quite different from the soft, even tones of his smaller and more handsome comrade.

"The cur! He gave no thanks, nor even asked your name. He has a little fortune for such a man, and if he lingers in Hard Pan longer than he can take a stage for some place where you will not be apt to trace him I am willing to give him twice as much. A braggart, a boaster,

probably a murderer. I see not what could lead you to do him such a foolish favor."

"Ha, ha! If he is the kettle where shall I look for the pot? I will wager you another thousand that he is none of those things, and that he shakes Hard Pan from the ground up, besides not forgetting to save my share of the profits of his invasion. A thousand, and I make it one of the conditions that my allotted portion of the proceeds reaches five thousand. Dare you take the bet?"

"Done," answered the other tersely, and extended his hand.

The smaller man touched it lightly, and then rode on, laughing softly to himself.

The sport thus left alone scarcely glanced after the retreating figures. He looked down carelessly at the notes he held in his hand, and then over his garments. Torn and dirt-begrimed as they were now, their material had originally been of good texture, and the suit fashionably built. The hat on his head certainly did not match with the rest, and was, in fact, a size or two too large. He had traded his vest for it with a rather respectable-looking miner whom he met on the road.

"Ha, ha," he laughed, looking himself over with something of pride. "There must be something of the thoroughbred about me, that's beyond all need of tailors. Robbed, murdered, hung and cut down for dead; and here I am again, fully healed and all serene. They do say that luck beats judgment; but when a man has the advantage of both he's hard to break. I don't think that man's a lunatic because he gave me a starter, but you can bet all the filthy lucre from Bad Rock to Hard Pan that his friend did! Who were they, anyhow? If I don't hear of my friend when I get to the burg I'll be away off. He's sport from 'way back. Now, if I find my dunnage there all right—lucky thought it was to send it on before the dam broke at Halcyon—I'll be ready to roll in with a howl."

In some such way ran his thoughts as he lay there, basking in the sun, resting the limbs that were, in spite of him, growing tired from his long and tedious tramp.

"Well, well. *Tempus fugit*, and I must be flying too. There's a few miles between this and Hard Pan, and I want to time my arrival so as to get in right after dark. By daylight, for a first appearance I'm afraid that a man of my looks would just strike them all dizzy. The gentleman who runs the 'Giraffe'—which I believe is the name of the caravansary at which I expect to stop—might hold back on the arrangement unless I referred him to my late traveling benefactor. Pity I didn't find out his name; though, if he didn't mention it I wasn't going to ask. I've been around myself."

He arose slowly, stretched his arms, felt of the revolver that lay along his hip, grasped the stout cane that he imagined somehow helped him on his way, and struck into a long-paced, swinging walk, that got him over the ground at a great rate.

The hours passed on, and as regularly the miles fell behind him. So well had he timed his speed to the distance that when the sun set he was only a mile or so from Hard Pan.

It was a descending grade all the way, until the stream was reached that flowed along the foot of the mountain, and on the other side of which lay Hard Pan.

Right here it was narrow and sluggish, but deep, and even at that the water was some twenty feet below the rude but substantial bridge by which it was spanned. There were times, however, when those wall-like banks of rock were brim full; and at the time of the flood, some years back, the original bridge was carried away.

At the bridge Hurrah Harry paused and looked down into the water. His appetite had been getting more sharply set as the twilight deepened, and all the wealth in his pocket seemed to be urging on the clamor of his stomach for a square meal.

Still he stopped at the bridge, and looked down into the water, as well as he could see it in the gloaming. He would have been more than mortal man if he could have refrained from doing that.

"Not a very nice place, that, for a spill. Looks as though there might be some rocks or snags sticking up in the bottom, and water enough everywhere else to drown a whale. I might be willing to take to it if I had lost my shooters, and that Halcyon mob was overhauling me, hand over fist; but, if I hadn't tasted the rope already, I don't know but what I would sooner risk that than the water. Ah! What was that?"

He started back from the flush flooring's edge, and gazed upward. The noise struck him as a cry of terror and a call for aid, from the lips of a woman.

Immediately afterward there was a muffled curse, the crack of a pistol, and then a female form emerged from a little clump of shrubbery, and came flying down the slope, to be headed off by a man who, not twenty feet from Harry, arose from the spot where he had been lying in concealment, and rushed toward the fugitive.

The woman gave a louder cry, and wheeling blindly, ran a few steps, and then pitched head-

long over the escarpment, just as the fellow, who had almost reached her, dropped to Harry's revolver. The High Horse from Halcyon knew nothing of the rights of the case, save that a woman was concerned, and he did not shoot to kill but only to keep. Then he leaned again over the water, and looked downward.

The gulch looked blacker, deeper, more dangerous. A woman struggled there, however, and he could hear her gurgling cries.

"Help! Save me! I am DROWN—"

The word ended in its very midst with a choking groan and a gasping cry. The wild struggles of the unfortunate had only served to hasten the end, and unless aid came very soon, it would come too late.

"It's a death-trap, sure enough," muttered Harry; "but it's a bait that my mother's only never refuses. Lovely woman, gallant knight—and down he goes!"

Without hesitation, he sprang from the bridge.

## CHAPTER II.

### DOWN TO THE RESCUE.

THE sport took chances that not many living men would have cared to risk. There was the danger of dashing against half-hidden rocks in taking the leap. Then there was the risk of drowning; the difficulty of making his exit from between those grim walls of rock; and the fact that if all other means of death failed, an uncertain number of desperate men would probably be on hand when he emerged. After what he had already seen, he could not doubt that they would slay before they would abandon their purpose, whatever it might be.

All of these things Harry knew, but he went down with the same alacrity that he seated himself at a card-table; and by the time that another man would have reached the point of hesitation, he was safely in the water.

It was a very narrow escape, though. It was no mistake when he thought he saw the cap of a projecting rock in that first survey that he took. A foot or two to the left and he never would have reached the water in condition to rescue drowning females, or look after even his own welfare. When he went down, down into the deep water, he grazed this rock sharply, as it was.

Once again at the surface, and he swam silently in what he conceived to be the right direction to find the woman. It was largely guess-work, but by taking an upward glance, and marking as well as he was able the distance he was from the bridge, he was sure that he was not far wrong. It was useless to call to the woman, since she was no doubt beyond hearing in her fright, and the sound of his voice would only serve to aid the villains above if they were on the watch.

The current was sluggish, but still there was a current. Just when he had risen from a long dive under the water, he heard a sharp gasp, not many yards below him. Instantly he turned in that direction and shot out for the sinking woman. Three or four strokes forward and downward, and then his hand touched something that he knew was part of a feminine garment. But for that gasp he never would have reached her in time, but now he had her on his arm, and, he believed, life was not yet ready to leave her.

"Now for the really ticklish part of the programme. It won't pay to stay down here and die with the cold and damp, to say nothing of the fact that a fellow can't keep on swimming around here all night. But, how a long-handled monkey, even, could scramble up there is a conundrum I'd give about a hundred to hear answered; while I'm only an average man with a pretty solid lump of womankind on my arms. I'll do it, though; and if those holy terrors will just be content to stop on the other side of the stream, and do their popping at long range, we'll beat them yet."

He was as cool as when, reclining by the roadside, he had chaffed the horseman who gave him such an unexpected stake. So, he wasted no strength in trying to struggle up the slippery wall that was almost at his hands, but slowly, and carefully keeping the mouth of his burden above water, he made his way back, up the stream, until he had reached the part of the channel directly beneath the bridge.

With something like a thrill of satisfaction he found that he had not been mistaken. Right here there was a possibility of ascending, or seemed to be from the foothold that he obtained at his first effort. Throwing the girl, or girl-woman, over his shoulder, Hurrah Harry slowly but surely won his way upward.

"Pretty well done, that, for a man that has tramped his thirty miles to-day on an empty stomach. Gently, you go down, my lady, for even Hurrah Harry can grow weary, and I don't propose to tote you all the way into town, if you can arrive there on your own proper means of locomotion. Young and interesting, I'll swear to it, and not likely to die in the bloom of her youth if that gasp goes for anything, and our friends from the river don't chip before we get our second wind. By the way, it might be as well to look a little out. I'm not in condition



to give more than four points in a game of high-low-jack."

Fortunately, as he afterward learned, there was a practical path out of the river's bed some hundred yards below, and to this one of the three ruffians engaged in the affair turned his attention, while the other assisted his wounded comrade. Hurrah Harry saw no more of them for the present.

A glance around showed him that there was nothing to fear in sight, and, once more, he bent over the girl, who seemed to be in a fair way to revive. He chafed her hands and wrists a little, and was surprised when she suddenly sat bolt upright, with her senses once more all about her.

"Who are you, sir? Are you one of the villains? Where am I? What has happened?"

"Take things more moderate, little woman. One conundrum at a time is enough for an ordinary man to struggle with. And when he has been pistoled, hung, starved, and drowned, if you pile them on too thick, it is just possible that you may get him confused. It is more important to know if you belong in Hard Pan, and if you are able to walk to the parental domicile. Sitting around in your wet duds may be fun for you, but it's not the thing that I most admire, even with a pretty girl to keep me company. If you're equal to the exertion, suppose we run now, and go into the explanations to-morrow morning. I can avow to one of your friends having a sore head; but if there's any more of them, I wouldn't be surprised to have them come prowling around at any moment."

His rambling speech gave the girl time to collect her thoughts. She no more looked at him as at an enemy, and when he ceased speaking she caught his hand.

"Thanks, thanks! A thousand thanks! I remember now. It was your coming that saved me. The villains thought to hide me until you went by, but I broke away. Then I fell into the river, and you must have brought me out. I was powerless, but I believe my senses did not altogether forsake me at any time. Come, I can walk, and it is better for us to get away from this spot."

She moved as she spoke, taking the road into the not far distant town, and Hurrah Harry stalked along at her side.

"A word or two will finish the explanation of the trouble in which you found me. My father, Jason Bartram, is considered one of the wealthy men of Hard Pan. Foolishly I had lingered at the bridge, alone, until sunset. Then these three ruffians attacked me. At first they demanded money, but they soon gave me to understand that they intended to hold me a prisoner until my father paid them a ransom that they thought was proportionate to my value. They said that they were going to take me to their stronghold in the mountains, and had already started when they heard your whistle as you came down the mountain-side."

"They took to cover, then, two of them holding fast to me, trying to terrify me with their threats, while the other hid himself beside the trail to find out if possible who it was that came that way. The rest of the affair you saw. I am afraid I cut a poor figure, but the shock of the fall unnerved me, and for a little I acted more like a crazy woman than anything else. If you had not come so bravely to my aid I should have drowned, in a few moments more. The knowledge that I cannot swim a stroke added to my confusion. I actually forgot the ruffians, and would have hailed the appearance of one of them to my rescue with delight."

"Don't worry over what's done and gone. I have seen strong men who acted a great deal worse, with the chances a deal more in their favor. But, who were these fellows? Have you ever seen them before? Hard Pan must be one of the places you read about, when such things can be done right in town."

"Hard Pan is bad enough, though it should not be blamed for what would have been stopped soon enough if there had been a chance to interfere. Of course, these men may belong in the town; but they were strangers to me. They hinted pretty plainly that they belonged to the band of 'King Cowl,' a certain road raider chief who is collecting tolls somewhere in these regions, and of whom we hear a great deal; but I have my own ideas about that. King Cowl and his men may be road-agents, but, as far as I have heard, they are not ordinary ruffians like these. They are supposed to do their robbing gently, and to look like what they profess to be, gentlemen of the road. But, these were low villains, without a single redeeming quality. I shudder to think of what might have been my fate in their hands."

"Reckon if you had on a few less wet duds you would not shudder quite so audibly. It won't do to strike up a run now, or we will have somebody shouting 'stop thief,' but I would advise walking at the fastest pace allowed by law. And, by the way, can you tell me where to find the Giraffe Hotel. I am a stranger in the town, and that is to be my headquarters."

"You cannot miss it. Go straight ahead until you come to a large, red building, the only painted one in the town. You will see the sign. Now, good-night. My way lies up yonder. I

have told you the name of my father, and his warmest thanks will be due you for the aid you have rendered his daughter. If he can help you in any way you have only to call upon him."

"Thanks, but I always help myself—to about all that is honestly in reach—and don't care to ask much of the balance. Good-night. I will probably see you again."

The young lady turned aside toward the residence of her father, while Hurrah Harry strode on toward the Giraffe.

### CHAPTER III.

#### STRIKING UP AN ACQUAINTANCE.

As Miss Bartram had informed him, there was little trouble in finding the Giraffe. For that section of the country it was quite a pretentious building, and it was patronized by the elite of the local as well as the transient portion of the community. At one end was the bar-room, presided over by Johnny Johnson, the most affable of bartenders when everything was running his way; while at the other end was the office, where the proprietor, Jem Hudson, was generally to be found. He was a burly Englishman, who had come to Hard Pan when the mines there were in their infancy, and having found a "pocket" that turned out a little fortune, before he had been mining a month, he put the proceeds into the Giraffe, as it then was. Some people laughed at him at the time, but the venture proved a success; he had added to the original building from time to time, until now he was one of the prominent and wealthiest citizens.

The appearance of a man of rags at the Giraffe was not always hailed with delight, and he was most frequently requested to step around to the back door. There a cold check could always be obtained gratis, sandwiched with the advice to move on to the next camp.

As Hurrah Harry was not only ragged, and generally disreputable looking, but the traces of his late immersion in the river were still plainly visible, his arrival in the office during the temporary absence of Mr. Hudson was greeted with no especial cordiality. His inquiry of the clerk behind the bar for Hudson was met by a shout of, "Go 'round to the back door!" and a laugh from some of the loungers that heard it.

"Back door, nothin'. Perhaps you'll shove that register this way, young man, and give yourself a chance to find out who I am. I sent my baggage on ahead, and if you please, I would like to be shown to my room."

"Yes, Jimmy, show him to his room," drawled one of the bystanders. "And be sure you give him a tub to drain in, and plenty of towels. It's Mr. Jonah, on his way to get there, and the boys have been throwing him overboard to fill in the time."

"You're wrong there," interrupted another. "It's Noah, just out of the ark. He slipped as he came, and fell over the dock. Oh, you can bet he's a navigator, if you only look at his boots."

"Only half right, my friend," coolly interfered Harry. "Navigator goes, but I draw the line at being good old Noah. If you don't tell I wouldn't mind letting you in to it that I am Christopher Columbus, the man that once cracked an egg to show how such things ought to be done. If there are any eggs here, good, bad, or indifferent, I'm willing to crack them just as they come, and I think I will begin with this gentleman who has been making remarks about the back door."

By this time those interested had obtained a better view of the stranger sport, and from his appearance they judged he was not exactly the sort of man that they desired to experiment with. Whoever of the patriarchs he might be, he had certainly never learned his lessons at the feet of Moses, and poverty had not tamed him a particle. As he made a step toward the clerk, a frown on his usually smiling face, that individual made a snatch at a revolver under the desk, at the same time hastily exclaiming:

"Mr. Hudson, look this way a moment, if you please."

As Mr. Hudson had heard from a distance something of the disturbance he was already on the way, and the appeal was not really necessary. Perhaps Jimmy had noted his coming from afar, and for that reason forbore showing the revolver that he was longing to produce. Hudson was rather strict about the use of deadly weapons around the Giraffe.

"What's all this habout?" he asked sharply, as he strode up to the side of the dilapidated sport, and ran him over with his cold blue eyes.

"He says his name's Christopher Columbus, and that he is laying for rotten eggs. That's why he was aching to go for Jimmy," volunteered a bystander.

"My heyes, w'ot's this town coming to?" exclaimed Hudson. At times he spoke like the average American, but when excited he was apt to get fairly tangled up in his aspirates.

"We don't keep rotten eggs at the Giraffe, hand hif there his hanyone gone for hin this 'ouse hit will be Jem 'Udson, 'imself."

"I only requested him to go to the back door,

like the rest of them," interposed Jimmy, "and he began his impudence at once. Was going to take the ranch."

"E was? We don't 'ave such things 'ere. March—"

He turned savagely on Harry, for it was a rule of his that he would have peace in his house if he had to fight for it himself.

His manner was not the kind that the sport was accustomed to submit to, to say nothing of the fact that he did not intend to go in any event.

"That would all be well enough, my friend," he answered, without a shadow of impatience in his voice, "if you were not keeping a public house. Chop your sign-post down and I'll go like a little man; but as long as you advertise entertainment for man and beast I'm a fixture. If I'm not a man you must prove that I am a beast, and the sooner you get to work the sooner I will know. So far, I believe the extent of my offending has been to ask for my room, and kick when the gentleman with the long ears referred me to the back door entrance. I have had all the walk to-day that I want in mine, and it takes a better man than there is in Hard Pan to make me take a single extra step. If any one imagines differently, the doors are open, and the performances may as well commence immediately."

Harry had measured up the landlord at his first glance. Not a bad sort of a man, but with an affection for having his own way, and a bit of a bruiser besides. The prospect of a turn-up with a tramp had no terrors for him, and the harder hitter he found him the better he would be apt to like it. Nor was this estimate a particle wrong, for Jem Hudson had been a pugilist of some note in his day, and had figured inside the magic circle more than once, both at home and in America.

While that sort would go into a simple case of bouncing, without much delay for talk, if he expected a square, stand-up fight, that was worth the name, he would not take any undue advantage, or cherish a grudge against the man who had done his best to make it interesting. The direct challenge was not thrown away. Jem looked his man over again, and understood him better. There was satisfaction needed somewhere, since this man, for all his ragged clothes, did not belong at the back door, even if he was temporarily under a cloud. An apology was really due, and the stranger had told what shape he wanted it made in.

The landlord drew off his coat and proceeded to do his best.

A ring reporter might have found the affair that followed of sufficient interest to divide his account off into rounds, and give the specific items; but for the purposes of the less enthusiastic reader it is enough to give general results. Hudson was not as young as he once was, and was slower in his deliveries than when he was one of the pets of the fancy; but he was a dangerous man yet, and if he could have got his right fairly home he might have done terrible execution.

At the outset he struck as hard as he ever did in his life; but he had no ordinary man against him, as he found when, time after time, he tried to get within distance, or let go at what he thought was an opening. The stranger was as quick as a cat, and had a guard of steel. He shifted to this side or that, and parried the blows that Hudson was sure would connect. For fully five minutes the Englishman strove in vain to get on him, and in all that time the stranger sport had never offered to strike a blow himself.

"It hout, man," Jem puffed, as he drew back a little to recover his wind, and perhaps to prepare for another line of tactics. "You can stop better than hany man Hi hever met, but Hi don't know hif you know 'ow to 'it."

"Oh, we're getting along very comfortably as it is," was the laughing answer. "I don't want to close your eyes till you have a chance to see if I get my name down right in the register. But don't crowd me too hard or I may have to give you one for the nob. If I do, you'll think you've always been knocked down."

The answer was a furious rush and a rally. Jem was tired of long range work, and finally he dashed in to a close.

Then, without any of the deeply interested spectators seeing how he got his grip, Harry picked the landlord up and fairly stood him on his head.

The fall was given as easily as one of that kind could be, but for full half a minute Jem lay motionless, though by no means senseless. Then, with a shout of: "Time! Curse you, why don't you 'it?" he sprung to his feet and made one more effort, that showed that the life was by no means out of him yet.

"Oh, well, if you will have it so, I suppose you must," answered Harry, quietly propping him with his left to get him just in proper distance.

Then his right shot out, with one of those strokes that need no repeating.

This time Hudson struck the floor with a crash that made one's bones ache to hear.

"Now, Jimmy," said the sport, turning to the clerk, "hand over that book, and we'll see what's



the number of my room. Perhaps the next time you will know a gentleman when you see him."

Jimmy knew his employer thoroughly if he did not the guest, and hesitated no longer. He turned the register around, and obsequiously handed the sport a pen, respectfully watching him as he signed, in bold but well-formed characters: "Hurrah Harry, the High Horse from Halcyon."

"Now get me into that room as quick as you can. I tumbled over into the drink at the edge of the town, and I have about a thousand in bills that need spreading out. Send my grip along up—it came over last week in the stage, to be held till called for—and then have a supper for about six men ready to be surrounded, as soon as I can get the decks cleared for action. I expect to stay here for a few weeks, and you and I are going to be the best friends that ever lived."

Jem Hudson was up, and listening to his remarks.

"Hof course you'll stay 'ere, Hiff the 'ouse ain't good enough Hi'll build another, blame my heyes hif Hi don't."

He extended his hand as he spoke, and Harry grasped it cordially.

"Nothing like fighting with a man in the good old way, to make him feel closer than a brother. We have had a fight together, now what do you say to a drink? Then I must look after the inner man as soon as I can make myself presentable. I have had a thirty mile tramp to-day, and blamed a thing to eat. That sort of thing has a tendency to make me weak."

"Never mind the drink, now. After supper will do for that, hand then we can take a dozen. Your grip his 'er e, hand hif you 'ad honly said something Hi wouldn't 'ave 'ad 'alf so big a 'ead, and wouldn't 'ave liked you 'alf so much. Hit's a pleasure to be knocked down by real gents like yourself."

On retiring to his room Harry found that, fortunately, his money was not seriously affected by the water. He hurriedly dropped himself into a fresh suit of clothes, that made him look like a new man. Then the landlord himself chaperoned him to the dining-room, where he did ample justice to the things set before him.

"Now for a place where they shuffle the pasteboards," he said, rising from the table a half-hour later. "That is what I came to Hard Pan for, and I may as well begin."

#### CHAPTER IV.

COLONEL CANTER, LATE U. S. ARMY.

It was not hard to find the way, to a gambling saloon in Hard Pan. A rock thrown in almost any direction from the door of the Giraffe, if it hit a building at all would be apt to land against one, and of the average citizens, nine out of ten could call it by name.

"There's plenty of them," said Hudson, whose aspirates were now generally all right, since his excitement had subsided, "but a gent like you don't want to go to no common plant, and don't want to waste yer time on low down-pikers, that haven't a stake among 'em. Take the 'Ivy-Green' if you want to meet men with heaps of blunt; and if you can tackle Colonel Canter there you can get as big a game as you want."

"The Ivy-Green is the horticultural establishment that I am looking for, then. Give me a map of the trail that leads there and I won't waste much time in getting inside of the bower. Maybe you would go along yourself? To tell the truth, I generally introduce myself; but you can see the fun, and won't feel any responsibility."

"Would like to awful well, but cawn't leave just now. May call in later, don't you know. I'll send some one to point it out, though. You might get into Mexican Mike's by mistake. And you don't want to make your first break there. They are rough hon strangers, and don't let them get away with any plunder if it can be 'elped."

"If there is any plunder to be had I'll run the risk of getting away with it; but, as you say, I'd better go for the biggest game first. By the way, who is the king-pin of your sharps, here—the man with stamps and nerve, generally supposed to be able to work them both for all that they are worth?"

"Colonel Canter is the man. But 'e's more than a sport, an' 'e's quick to draw. You want to keep both your two heyes hopen."

The landlord had been escorting his guest to the bar-room, and having taken the samples that had been mentioned before supper, he picked out the man that was to serve as guide to the Ivy-Green.

The man looked a good deal like the average miner in hard luck and rapidly running down into the professional beat, though his face had not yet assumed the whisky-sodden look that belongs to the latter class, and he had not the brazen air of one who is lost beyond redemption. Hudson had taken him on the Giraffe out of pity, and he was a sort of general utility man for all light work, receiving his pay in victuals and an occasional drink.

The sport spoke a few words to him as they went along, and took a fancy to him on the spot. He seemed too good a man for the posi-

tion he occupied, though by no means the shrewdest fellow that he had ever met.

"There's something queer about you, old fellow, and I wouldn't wonder if it was worth while to hear your story. What do they call you, hereabouts?"

The question of the sport would have brought a fund of information if he had allowed it to come forth, but he only had time for the opening portion.

"So they call you 'Looney Lum,' and they are all mistaken. You have the key to the Bonanza, and you only want two thousand from some sport to make an even divy. Um! I have met about a hundred gentlemen who said the same thing, and I always gave them a starter if I had the stamps. I never knew one of them to find the mine they were so sure of, or to return the small loan on account; but it made them feel good for the time being, and that was about as much as they ought to ask. If I don't go broke to-night, come around to my room tomorrow and I'll see what is the smallest amount it will take to fix you off. Now then, I'm here, guess I won't need you. Here's something for a starter. If you have any luck at such things go and break a small-sized faro-bank somewhere else, and to-morrow you won't have to have a pard to help you develop that bonanza."

He placed twenty dollars in the hand of the astonished Lum as he spoke, and then hastily turned away and entered the Ivy-Green.

As the landlord of the Giraffe had warned him, this was the first-class gambling-den of the place, where he would be apt to meet some of the best men of their class in Hard Pan, and Hurrah Harry looked around him with a mild curiosity as he entered the room.

He knew at a glance that he had made no mistake in the place. There was hardly a face there that he would not have recognized as belonging to a sport, if he had seen it for the first time in a church. Outwardly, no sign was given that any one recognized him; but there were certain little indications that led him to believe that his affair at the Giraffe had been published, and that he was identified as being one of the principals.

That made him feel neither better nor worse, and there were never any times nor circumstances under which the sport was inclined to bashfulness. He swung up to the bar, nodded to the gorgeous gentleman that presided over its destinies, and then turned toward the company.

"There is a difference in customs, gentlemen, and I generally do as the Romans when I strike their camp. I expect to sample the stock, and I believe in the good old saying that it's not good for man to drink alone. I should be pleased to have as many as can do it constantly with their own principles, join me. A trifle of the best, Johnny, for myself, and all inquiring friends."

"We don't draw any lines here for strangers to toe," said a keen-eyed, handsome looking man, stepping forward, fixing on him a gaze that was evidently to take his measure.

"If a gentleman behaves himself he can even go so far as to drink alone at the Ivy-Green. At the same time we like to be sociable; and if a man can't get acquainted here he had better let the job out to some one else. He'll never learn how. Pardon me, but—my card will give you further information."

He extended a bit of pasteboard toward Harry, with a graceful bend of his arm, and the sport glancing downward silently read:

"CHESTER CANTER,

(LATE, U. S. ARMY.)

*Manager of The Golden Stream."*

"Happy to meet you, and will be pleased to have any of your friends join us. By an unfortunate accident I lost my card case on the way hither, but if you have any occasion you can pick out as much as you choose from the register up at the Giraffe, where I stand entered as Hurrah Harry, the High Horse from Halcyon. If I had only known, I might have remonstrated with my sponsors; but as I don't care to swop horses when I'm in the swim it will have to go. Please name your vanity."

The name was hardly what the colonel expected to hear from the manner that the stranger had assumed, but he made no remarks on it, simply nodding and assuming a place at the bar. His movement was the signal for a general one. The long line nodded and tossed off their portions, and Hurrah Harry was at home in the Ivy-Green.

"You expect to stay some time in Hard Pan, I suppose?" inquired the colonel, as they moved away from the bar.

"Only until the town goes broke," was the smiling answer. "It never pays to linger after you scoop the pile. I did that over at Halcyon and they came back on me. The good friends that induced me to stop over have probably corraled their share of the plunder. If I get time to go back I'll talk to them, anyway."

"Had some difficulty there, then? Halcyon is a rough town, and you can be glad that you got out of it alive. But does the town that you

strike always go broke? If so we may give you a sensation here, by showing you the exception to the rule."

"With capital suitable to the undertaking I never fail."

"Ha, ha! Then, I suppose the sooner we get down to work the sooner the rest of the town will know how they are to come out. Unless, indeed you prefer to tackle the lay-out first—which may not leave as much for me."

The colonel laughed as he spoke, but there was no question about his being in earnest in his challenge; and Harry found himself saved of all trouble in finding an opening. He might have preferred becoming better acquainted with some of the others while the chance was open, but as the colonel made a movement to lead the way he did not hesitate but followed him into the other room.

"I am sorry," said Canter, looking at his watch, "but I can only give you an hour of my time. For any one but a stranger to the camp I could not spare that. We can get a fair start in that time, however, and finish up the game at our leisure the next time we meet."

"That's an odd sort of a plan," answered Harry, not altogether satisfied with the arrangement. "Suppose the next man that strikes you gets what's left. That's rough on me after opening up the vein. Maybe you would as soon introduce me to a friend that would stay with me till the huckskin is empty."

"Just as you choose; but if you take water on what's offered it will be some time before the boys in Hard Pan can be led to look on you as a chief. I had heard enough of you and your doings at the Giraffe to make me willing to strain a point to show you some attention, but I am afraid it is courtesy thrown away. There is Jack Dempsey, over yonder. I think he is just the style of man that suits your gait. Shall I call him?"

Jack Dempsey was tall, rawboned and vicious-looking in spite of his good clothes. The difference in grade between him and the colonel was apparent at a glance to so experienced a gentleman as Hurrah Harry.

"That's always the way with me; I want the earth. When I get hold of a good thing I howl for more. No, I'll not trouble Mr. Dempsey while I can do business with Colonel Canter. Push on the business. A heap of work can be got over in an hour—but it don't leave much time for the preliminaries. Draw, I suppose; and straights go, in all the variations?"

"Correct in the rudiments, as taught at the Ivy-Green. Cut for the deal."

"Five for ante is about the proper thing. Your ace takes the deal," and the game began.

#### CHAPTER V.

WHEREIN THE "RULE OF THE HOUSE" DON'T APPLY.

THE colonel was telling the simple truth in regard to the amount of time that was honestly at his disposal. He had an engagement, and one that he did not care to slight. When he allowed Hurrah Harry an hour he was positively encroaching on the time that was not his; but he was anxious to meet this sport; and thought that if he was as reckless in his play as he was in other things, the time might be long enough for him to size his pile.

Reckless as he undoubtedly was Hurrah Harry understood his business; and as he thought about as fast as two ordinary men, perhaps he was not as reckless as he seemed.

At any rate he drew up his cards and looked over his hand just as any one else would have done, drew to a pair of queens, risked a little, and took the pot and the deal without any serious objection.

"Luck comes my way already," he said, as he drew in the deck. "I start out with a roll, stun the man on the other side of the table, and the shekels that are left when the game breaks up are not in his pockets, by a long sight."

Fingers never flew more deftly than those of the sport, as he handled the deck. By the time he had finished his little speech the deal was done.

The colonel watched sharply, though there was no conceivable way in which the deck could have been set up, and as the cards were furnished by the house if any one knew them it should be the colonel rather than the sport.

"One will be enough for me," said Canter, quietly, as he sorted over his hand.

"Take it and welcome," retorted Harry, briskly.

"As I always try and let well enough alone I'll allow things to stay as they are. Say something, I like to hear a man talk if it's only the right thing. And if he can't talk it's next best to let his money and cards talk for him. With reasonable luck all I want is a sight for my pile and I go home contented."

"It's to be hoped that you have paid for a week in advance at the Giraffe," said Canter, dryly. "Hudson is a peculiar man, and don't accumulate many bad debts."

"Don't suppose that the walking can be any better than it is now. I've just been trying it, and ought to know. If that is the hardest you can afford to hit a fellow there's going to be more fun than profit in this little hour of ex-



periment. It might be worth while to pass out and wait for something better as the game grows older. Let's see, though, if it's theft or square dealing that little five of yours is meaning. Just a leetle better, colonel, if you want to capture that ante."

On the five that the colonel dropped Harry fluttered down a ten, and throwing himself back in his chair, looked at his antagonist with a provoking twinkle in his eyes. It was certain that he was none of your immobile players, but that he was away at the other extreme.

The colonel looked him over with the coldest kind of a stare. Cordiality had ceased with him when they had once seated themselves at the table; and now, though he gave no sign, Harry could have sworn that there was something more than the mere ice of a gambler in that look. Why there should be any personal feeling was more than he could imagine, but if Colonel Canter did not hate him from the ground up he had made a bigger mistake than the average of his conclusions amounted to.

The sport was not the kind of a man to have his nerves unhinged by that kind of a discovery, and the only effect it could have would be to make him seemingly a little more reckless, and a trifle more good-natured.

The survey taken by Canter appeared to have produced a satisfactory conclusion, for he covered the ten of the sport, and this time the figure on the end of his bill was a great big C.

"Gets more and more my way. Oh, I tell you, with a little persuasion I wouldn't wonder if I managed to get a little life into the game yet. You'll find that all it needs to make things interesting is to stir up the animiles. If they don't growl they get ready to bite. A little raise can't hurt anything. I see four just like that in my little fortune and they all are requested to get there with neatness and dispatch."

"My hand is just as good a betting hand as it was, no better and no worse. Four hundred more will hold my word good."

The colonel laid the amount he named down quietly, and it rested with the stranger sport. The latter ran over his cards again, and answered:

"My style to a ty-t. Four hundred goes again."

"And here once more."

"And here once—but hold on. Now you are getting me close at home. Sorry, I can't do better, but if I raise you fifty it will empty the buckskin, and here she goes. I'm game to give you a chance at my last dollar."

"Are you talking now, or is it your money?" said the colonel, coldly. "Because you don't agree, and it may be as well to decide that point before we show up. If I can save a five out of the general wreck I'll have that much for a starter."

Canter was inclined to be sarcastic, but the sport retained his unruffled front as he looked askance at the small bills he had tossed on the table, and knit his brows in study.

"Guess you're right, colonel. Astonishing how whisky for the house eats into one's small change. I was sure there was another five there, and I do like to make it even money when I bet!"

The game had begun to attract some attention, though contrary to Harry's opinion at the time, no one had followed directly in from the bar-room. The sport sat so that no one had a chance to see his hand, but from the confident way in which he backed it, any one would be at liberty to suppose that it was a good one, and in the line of spectators stood Jack Dempsey, known to be a thorough-paced gambler. It surprised no one as much as it did Harry, when he exclaimed:

"If you've got a good thing hold on to it. If I had more rocks I'd do you better, but what's the matter with borrowing what I can spare?"

And the gambler tossed down in front of Harry a twenty dollar gold-piece.

"Thanks, awfully. I'll hand you your change when the hand is played."

Half an hour before he would have resented the offer in no very pleasant style; but now he had reasons of his own for accepting it, and as he drew down some of the smaller notes to make way for the twenty, he smiled at the colonel.

"May as well be a thoroughbred as anything. You are twice as apt to find backing."

"You think so," said the colonel, tossing the contents of his wallet on the table.

"There is a little three thousand more. You borrowed to raise—see if you can borrow to come in."

Jack Dempsey, at the colonel's elbow, gave a chuckle, and there seemed to be a general interest among the Hard Pan sports to see how the High Horse from Halcyon was going to express himself in regard to the situation. If he didn't know the rule of the house it was his own fault. It was noticeable that several stepped a trifle to one side, as though they fancied they might be in line.

"And that's your idea of draw, is it?" asked Harry, quietly, looking up.

"About—when I tackle a mighty chief, who

starts in to beggar Hard Pan with a pitiful little thousand dollars. What are you going to do? Shoot, Luke, or give up your gun."

"Oh, bless your soul, no. We haven't got to the shooting stage yet. For the present, I am only going to call."

"On sixes, or something else?" asked the colonel, sharply, with a warning glitter in his eye.

"On cash, to be sure. It strikes me you must have heard of the fun at Halcyon, but it seems you don't know the bottom facts. They did jump me, and they did clean me out, but all they got was pure velvet. The original capital has been kicking around Hard Pan for a week in an old gripsack, and there's the bulk of it!"

From around his waist the High Horse drew a money belt, and counted down the money to back his call.

"And now, my noble liege, let's see the best you have."

In spite of his cold courage, there was a fall in the face of the colonel that an old hand like Hurrah Harry could easily discern, for of course he was watching him sharply enough. And though, as he was sitting with his back to the house, his friends and admirers could not see it, they knew well enough that something in his calculations had gone wrong. There was a little stir in the crowd, and Hurrah Harry, with a vivid remembrance of late experiences at Halcyon, gathered himself together for what might follow, keeping up, however, a front as careless as ever.

The colonel made no other sign; and the danger did not come any nearer. Without preliminary nonsense he turned up his cards, and showed four ten spots and an ace.

"If you have a bigger hand take the pot and the game is done for to-night."

"Just a leetle better, my lord. When I stand pat, you can do like Jack Dempsey, here—put up your money on it that it is worth a heap of coin. By all the rules of draw, four queens and a deuce will take the pile; and there they are."

"You are better than you look, young man," said the colonel quietly, as he rose from his chair.

"I have wasted some valuable time and about four thousand in learning the facts; but I'll not forget them. The next time I want to tackle you when your luck is not running quite so high, or mine is considerably better. I think my credit is good at the bar to call up the house—it's on me, sure—and then I will stand adjourned."

Canter was certainly a good loser, and concealed his disappointment well. There was a subdued murmur on the part of his admirers, and a move for the other room.

Hurrah Harry went with the rest, and he certainly had a right to be as jovial as any of them. While Canter had a strong circle of admirers, there were others who were unattached, and were ready to show their appreciation of the new man.

All that was an old story with the sport. He had been successful before, and he knew what it all amounted to. He ruffled around for awhile, in his own peculiar style; spent money freely; and in his most careless moments was never off of his guard for an instant, even though the reputation of the Ivy-Green for fair play was unblemished. He made no efforts to get into another game, nor did he receive any challenge to enter one. Half an hour or so passed, and then he showed signs of wanting to move.

"Can any of you gents give me an idea of where Pedro Mercator holds forth? I have a little business with him, and the sooner it is done the sooner I will have it off my mind."

Everybody was able to answer the question. Pedro Mercator was a well-known private banker. Of course, at this hour in the evening his bank was closed, but as he seldom went abroad after dark there was little doubt of his being found at home.

"But, sport, I don't know that I would care to go snooping around his house this time of night. He has a queer sort of way of using a shot-gun out of his windows if he don't just happen to know who's who; and then it's mighty lonesome out that way, and there's a sort of gang around Hard Pan that they call the Highbinders. They club men that walk around in the dark with boodle in their pockets till they go to sleep. Sometimes they don't wake up again, either."

"John Chinamen, are they? What are they doing down this way? Why don't you clean them out?"

"Oh, no. They don't belong to that sort either. It's just a name we have for them. They only go for the wealth they can find."

"Sluggers from 'Wayback, eh? All right. That's just the sort I dote on climbing, and if you hear any howls from the backwoods shortly after I leave, you can tot it up that they are not mine. By the way, there's the detail for guide duty now. I won't trouble you for further particulars. Hello, Lum! How did the shoestring turn out? Did you bust a bank?"

"Nary bust, oh, most powerful potentate. Not on that side, at least. The bank bath busted me."

"All right. I'll start you again when I strike some big game myself, and don't need you to help tackle it. You know the road to Pedro Mercator's house of refuge?"

"I do, oh pacha of many tails."

"Then lead on, and I will follow thee."

Without a word of demur Looney Lum led the way out of the saloon, and started along the street at a great pace.

The route taken soon led out of the populous part of town, and grew as desolate as the prince of robbers could have desired.

"Know anything about the Highbinders?" asked Harry, as he noted that there was a depression in the ground and that not a house nor light could be seen.

"Hush, your Majesty, they are evil birds to talk of, and their coming means death."

"Get ready to climb the golden stairs if that is the case," whispered Harry, "for here they come now."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE INDUSTRIOUS "HIGHBINDERS."

EITHER through one of the lucky chances that are supposed to aid fools and innocents, or because he was a great deal shrewder than he seemed, Looney Lum had almost succeeded in throwing the Highbinders off of the trail. It was not likely that they would be lying around such a desolate place on the mere chance of some passenger worth the picking coming that way. In all probability they would know the game they were after, and if any attack was to be made it would be by men who had dogged them from the vicinity of the Ivy-Green, or who, being aware of their destination, had arranged an ambush accordingly.

This latter was avoided by the irregular course they had taken, and the result was that the gang was following in a pursuit that was so hot that it could not be noiseless, much as they tried to make it so. When Harry whispered his warning, they were still some little distance in his rear, flitting on like shadows. It was only a keen ear that could have heard the light swish of their footsteps, and a sharp eye that could separate the shadowy forms at a single glance.

There was every chance for the sport to draw and open fire, if he had so chosen, and had been actually convinced that an attack was intended. It was a pretty sure thing; but it would be a serious matter to get away with some of Hard Pan's solid citizens by mistake.

"Lum may do for a sort of Quaker gun, and they won't want any shooting if they can help it; I reckon I'll give them a little rope, and see how the game pans out," muttered Harry, and he waited until they were almost within cudgel distance.

Then he wheeled about suddenly.

"Hold on there, sports. You're out late on a dark night. What's your game?"

The unexpected movement caused a recoil of those nearest, but from the rear came a cry, harsh and half-growled: "Down him, boys—down 'em both, fur keeps. It's heap big money ef you hev ter make 'em croak."

"That's just what I wanted to know," laughed the sport, as he sprung forward to meet the attack more than half-way.

He sprung, and he meant to spring. Such a gigantic bound as he gave was an astonisher to the ruffians as well as to Looney Lum. They had never seen anything like it in all their experience. He shot right between the leaders, and alighted clear beyond their reach, his fist and shoulder swinging out as he struck the ground. If he had not had something to lean against he would have fallen headlong from the force of his own blow.

The post that he leaned against was one of the Highbinders, however, and the man fell so flat that he looked as though he had always been knocked down; while the crack of his jaw was heard twenty yards. Then the sport, balancing back from the shot, let go his left at the nearest head on the other side. The receiver did not at once fall, but he went stumbling along, head down and heels trying to get up, until his feet tripped, and he stretched his length on the ground, too badly dazed to take a hand in it for a minute or two to come.

This left four men standing, and the odds were still large enough to satisfy the greatest glutton. They were all bad men, fully armed, and it was not likely that the proposed victim would be allowed to escape scathless, even if the noise of their work would have to be dangerously loud. Each man held a bludgeon, and as they wheeled they raised them high in air, and together rushed upon the High Horse.

Some such movement as that was what he had expected, and he had already made his arrangements to meet it. He stooped, caught up the rough he had first knocked down, turned upon them with him in his gripe, and with one prodigious swing hurled him right at the four, following up the human projectile so quickly that there was no time to recover from the shock before he was upon them. Right and left, right and left went his blows. They came hot from the shoulder, and all his weight seemed to go with them. Two more men dropped, while the other two, reeling from the crashing hits they



had received, suddenly bounded away in full flight.

Without hesitation Hurrah Harry dashed off in hot pursuit. They only had a few yards the start, but they were nerved to desperation by the terrible nature of the resistance they had encountered, and fled wildly.

On the first burst it looked as though they were going to outpace the sport altogether, for they ran two yards to his one. But that did not last long. Their speed slackened, and his increased. They were straining every nerve so that they had no time to think of drawing any weapon to replace the cudgels they had cast away. Pretty soon a short, chopping hit landed on the back of the neck of the rearmost of the two, and he went stumbling forward, to plow up the ground with his nose. Then the fingers of the sport settled on the collar of the other, and after that the victory was complete. A twist and a jerk, and the fellow was over his knee.

They were both somewhat blown from their sharp run, but it did not take Hurrah Harry long to recover his breath, and while he was holding the unhappy Highbinder as though he was an infant, Looney Lum came puffing to the spot. He had a heap of good intentions, but the trouble was over so soon that he had not gathered himself together enough to get in a single blow.

"Why, this is fun amazing," laughed Harry, as his guide came up. "Have any of them got away, or have we bagged the whole outfit? If we haven't, I reckon it's a Christian duty to take the back trail and gather them in. How are the four that I saved back yonder? Have any of them commenced to wiggle?"

"They wiggle, oh, noble patriarch, but they have failed to progress. I trow they be in such a plight that an infant could settle them with a club. Howbeit, if they be not attended to soon, they will e'en crawl off to their dens, and be seen no more for a season."

"Some of them will want to go into the shop, eh? Well, now, you just bet they will. The fellow with the broken jaw won't want to do any more highbiding for a month, and the rest won't worry about waking up travelers this night till the bees get out of their bonnets, and that is going to take a little time. It was Hurrah Harry that hit them, and when he sails in lemons he comes for keeps. I guess we'll leave them as they are, and the next thing to do is to decide what is to be done with this precious pair. I see that fellow has commenced to squirm. Just sit down on him hard, if you please, while I figure it up."

"Hard it is, most gracious liege."

Looney Lum dropped upon the fellow like a moving mountain, flattening him out again just as he was beginning to try and scramble to his feet. Settling himself by two or three substantial jounces he looked patiently up, and awaited orders.

"Now, then, let's try and see what you look like," continued Harry, twisting the man around that he held captive. "If the scallywag ain't masked, just as though he was going to play desperado. Come, old boy, find a tongue and give an account of yourself. What do you want with me?"

"Not a blamed thing," growled the fellow, in accents of deep disgust. "Ef all boodle war ez hard to git at ez yourn you kin write it down thet thar would be a heap more honest men in ther world. It's amazin' how quick I've bin converted. And, boss, ef yer lets us off this time—"

"You're ready to swear that you won't make such a miserable failure the next. You seem like a jovial sort of a ruffian, barring your little failings in the line of theft, slugging, murder, and some other odds and ends of accomplishments. What sort of a fellow is your pard? Same kind, eh?"

"Purty much ov a muchness, an' might hev bin hatched out ov ther same batch. He kin speak fur himself, ef you give him a chance. I got all I want ter do, blowin' my own horn."

It was too dark to see at all clearly the face of this man, even after the mask had been removed, but in a general way he looked like a bulldog ruffian, of the baser sort. He spoke sullenly at first, but his tone rapidly changed into a more careless sort of growl.

"Let him up, Lumuel," said Harry, "if he seems wide enough awake to listen to a few remarks that are chiefly for his own good."

"Up he is, most puissant lord paramount. An your dukeship object not I would fain hold this firearm at his ear. I trust not in his peaceable intentions."

Lum showed he was strong by lifting his prisoner to his feet without any effort; and that he was wise by the precautions that he immediately took and announced.

"Don't crowd us, Cap," rumbled this other man. "You hev done enough fur glory, an' thar ain't no fun, an' ther' are consid'r'ble reesk tryin' ter git ther necks ov two good men in a noose."

"What are you talking about? Come off! No one wants to noose you; I only want to get you down fine for future reference, if I don't want to use you right now. You seem to be a

pair that ought to know the ropes, and I want to take a fling around town after I have finished a little business on hand. What do you say? Will you go along and act square till the next time we meet?"

"Ef you're willin' ter run ther risks I guess we ain't objectin'. Ther' can't be no game behind it er you couldn't hit so hard. Count us in. And it's a mighty hard crowd that you'll strike if you train with us."

"All right, then. I'll go see Mercator, and then we can take in the camp."

"Excuse me, most gracious governor, but a word if thy servant dare speak. An' it is thy will to take with thee these gentlemen who walk in the night, and whose deeds are evil?"

"That is the revised programme, Lumuel," responded Harry, to the question of his guide.

"Then, may it please your chieftanship, thy vassal wants to go home. It makes him weak."

"Go then, by all means; and I'll see you again in the morning."

"If thou only dost," was the hasty answer, and without stopping to say good-night, Looney Lum darted away, with a speed that showed his weakness was not of the legs.

"Hurrah, boys! I don't want to find Pedro in bed. Step out, and we can have a little pleasant converse as we go along."

It was not far now to the residence of the banker, and having been posted Harry could find it without any further direction.

The banker was not in bed, and had no notion of going there for some time to come, as he was entertaining a dozen visitors at least, who were his friends. If it had not been so there might have been some trouble in getting in. He was a wary old rat, who knew how to take care of his cheese.

In answer to Harry's knock a domestic came to the door, and received his application for admittance; but left him on the outside with the key turned while it was being referred.

Pedro had an office in one corner of his mansion, and without much delay he sought it, giving orders to admit the callers.

He looked up as though somewhat startled when the sport and his escort filed in, and then nodded coldly.

"Pedro, you unconscionable old wretch," said Harry, without delay, "I want three thousand dollars to meet a raise with four queens, stood pat, and the other man took one card."

#### CHAPTER VII.

##### A STRAIGHT BLUFF.

PEDRO MERCATOR, was a little, dried-up sort of a man, with a keen, black eye, and a hooked nose, who was generally spoken of as a Jew, though he called himself a Mexican, and mingled with society without his word being openly questioned. His dealings were by no means confined to Hard Pan, and though he seemed to be a fixture there he had only made his appearance in the town within the last year, having come to look after his interests in the Golden Stream Mine, of which Colonel Canter was now the manager and part owner.

He loaned a great deal of money, and made his big profits in doing it; and he looked after his security as closely as the closest, and the two Highbinders, who were blinking at the principals from the corner nearest the door, opened their eyes at the address of the sport, and looked for a summary command to retire.

Nothing of the kind came, however. Instead, there was just as much of a smile on the countenance of Pedro Mercator as any one had ever seen on that wrinkled face.

"Ever the same. An hour in town and I'll wager thou art standing to win a little fortune, such as my toil for years will not bring to me. Yet it will go, no doubt, like all the rest, in some unlucky vein. Art sure thou art in the winning humor now?"

"Dead sure, Uncle Abraham. The tide turned on the way from Halcyon, and now there is nothing to stop me till I clean the town."

"And how many men hast thou put to sleep since here? Thou art generally anxious to prepare a cushion on which thou mayest thyself rest a little later if need be, when thine own tumble comes."

"Oh, half a dozen or so, but none of them went down so hard that they won't get up again. You know I only keep when I can't give away—bodies I mean, of course. But how about the three thousand, worthy Abednego?"

"This will be thy final loan in camp?" asked Pedro, warily.

"Unless you want to invest further, and make the offer."

"My safe is closed for the night so that even I could not open it if I wished, and I keep no such sum about me; but my check is as good as the gold, and that thou shall have, both for the sake of old times and for profit in the present."

From the locked drawer which he carefully opened Pedro took out his check book and wrote an order on his bank for the amount; and in Hard Pan that was better than money, because it showed that the banker thought well enough of the sport to have dealings with him.

Harry took the paper in his hands and as he looked it over uttered a laugh that was even a little more genial than usual. There was a five

hundred tacked on the end of it. If his call resulted disastrously it would take the sport out of town; for Pedro knew that he was like those hawks who if they miss their first quarry never try to strike again in the same place.

"You old vagabond! I always told you you were as white as they make 'em. I wanted a favor of your hands, but it was not money; and I only wanted to know if I had two ropes to climb when the colonel thought he had me in a hole. Fact is, I learned temporary wisdom at Halcyon. I made a raffle on the four of a kind because I had a little nest egg to fall back on, and now I have entirely too much wealth to keep lying around in my pockets, and I want you to take charge of some of it until I want it—which won't be long. My thanks all the same."

And Harry laid the check back on the table, and on top of it his winnings, and the greater part of the capital with which he had started in at the Ivy-Green.

"You want the check to go in to your account?" asked Mercator, evincing no surprise.

"Well, yes, may as well swell the account to all it will carry. There, I feel quite relieved. The temptation to such men as my friends at the door will not be half so great. They and some other friends tried to mob me on the way here, and as these had heads not quite so sore as the rest I brought them along to show me the ropes. With empty pockets I can risk a fling around town."

"They would murder thee for the half of what thou still hast; but that is thy lookout and their danger. Thou didst a service once to Mercator, in thine own careless way, and it will never be forgotten."

"Fudge! The men that had thee went down like ten-pins. It was hardly exercise."

"But there were a dozen. What other single man would have attacked them for the sake of a stranger?"

"Good luck for you, then, that I didn't happen to be one of the other men. Good-night, and the dreams of the blessed be with you."

At a motion the two men at the door arose and followed him out, and without delay they hastened back to the sporting part of the town.

The three men walked side by side. Harry had but little to say and made no show of paying attention to the actions of his body-guard. For all they could see they had a chance a dozen times over to club him.

They were not engaged in the clubbing business as extensively as they thought they were an hour or less before. The wonderful way in which he had disposed of the whole six had opened their eyes; and the conversation with such a man as Pedro Mercator had shown that it was no happy chance, but that such victories were the regular rule.

"Say, boss, if yer don't object to a question," said the man whom Harry had captured in the little foot-race that wound up the affray, "I'd like ter ask ef you be ez handy with ther pop-guns ez you be with the mawleys? An' ef you be how it comes you didn't lay us all cold ter-night, 'stead ov runnin' ther chances. You knowed what sort ov a gang we be—they told yer back at ther Ivy—an' ef ary one ov us hed got in a crack with a stick it would hev bin all up with you."

"I didn't get the crack, and that is good enough for the second part of your discourse. And for the first—I wouldn't wonder if I dropped one of your crowd, about sunset, just over the river. I don't shoot as often as some; but when I pick trigger I always lay the lead where I want it. When the first lesson with the fist don't answer the second with the patent preservative pill never fails. Don't forget that. And now, I'm not asking any questions about your pards; but I want to know what you two answer for when they call you in to supper. When I hear them talk about two real bad men I ought to understand whether they are chinning about the galoots I am taking in tow."

"They call me Baby Bunting around here," was the answer of the man addressed. "Mebbe, ef you ever see'd me afore I wa'n't sailin' under that flag, but hyer it goes, ez good ez wheat. Pard kin speak fur hisself."

"Oh, I'm old Dad Horner, what's gettin' up in years. Ef I ain't ez old ez I look that's somethin' else. Ef we knowed jest what you hed in fur us we might know a heap better how long ter stay with yer. We ain't yearnin' to be showed off ez a lot ov Highbinders that you've roped. It mout make ther boys laugh, an' that we hate wuss than pizen."

"Rest easy. Pedro don't count, and I had to tell him; but if you two forget about our tea-party I swear I won't remember. I understand that there are some bad places that are worth the seeing, and I want some one that won't be scared along to hold my coat. If I don't take in the side-shows to-night I may not find the time. That's all there is of it."

"That's all right then—hist! There are some of the gang in the bushes, now. Take it easy and we'll stand 'em off fur you. Come in, pard, you shan't be hurt ef you don't try any foolishness. Ef you do, salt won't save yer."

They were just turning into the main street of the town, not far from the Ivy-Green, and met



three men squarely, who drew hastily back as their eyes fell on Hurrah Harry, who was striding along with both hands in their respective side-pockets.

At the call the three men slouched up, keeping an eye on Harry, and the spots where his hands were supposed to be. They were pretty confident that he was holding the drop on two of them, and wished that they understood his intentions better.

"May as well tell yer, this gentleman hes treated us white, an' wants us ter show him around town. His boodle are all in ther safe at Mercator's exceptin' his spendin' money fur ther boys, an' from what we've hearn an' see'd he's a holy terror frum head-waters. You boys don't want ter monkey round ther buzz-saw ef you don't want ter lose a head—an' we holdin' ther saw logs ef we hev ter. Han's off, fur ter-night, anyhow."

Dad Horner put it very plain, and if looks went for anything he meant every word he said. One of his pards answered, in no very gentle terms:

"Dog blast yer hide, ef that's ther sort you be jest look out yer don't git it west-end-crooked some dark night. An' Smoke a-layin' at ther p'int ov death, with his jaw so stove yer can't tell it from a box of matches. Why don't yer slug him in ther neck, Baby? Ef yer weighed a pound you'd jump him now, an' we all ready ter wade right in on top ef we knowed you warn't goin' ter shake old pards."

"Dad give in my platform. Ef you want him slugged why don't yer do it yerselves?"

"Can't yer see he hes us kivered?"

"An' he'll allers hev yer, jest that way. You go nuss Smoke ef yer wants ter keep out ov ther draft, an' mean' Dad'll run our own clam wagon. You hear me whisper?"

"You'll hear somethin' else, fu'st chance; an' ez fur you, stranger, next time we'll try somethin' with a hole in it. Don't furgit we're lookin' fur ye."

"Got it all down fine, eh? I don't care to stir up the boys over at Mike's just when I'm going to take a peep at them. They wouldn't settle down to their natural gait before bedtime. That's all your luck and my loss. If, however, we meet again, and there is any foolishness, such as you talk of, I give you fair warning that I will kill you all three. Now, chip, or pass on."

There was a sternness in his voice that warned them he did not mean to trifle. There was also a suspicious upward motion of the skirts of his coat, till they could almost see the bullets of the hidden derringers starting. They did not answer, but wheeling, strode back in the direction whence they had come.

"It takes sand ter come up ter ther rack when a sport talks that kind ov business," grinned Baby.

"They have the sand, I reckon," retorted Harry, "but they have sense along with it, and didn't care to call the turn when every chance was dead open and shut against them. Now then, where is Mike's? We will go in for a little relaxation. They say it is generally interesting there."

"You bet it is. There's a heap harder, looking place in Hard Pan; but none ov 'em turn out ez many stiffs. It's only a step or two—yonder, whar you kin see the red curtains. An' it 'pears ter me thet thar's s'uthing goin' on thar now."

The building pointed out was not far distant, and as Harry looked there seemed to be a little commotion at the doors, like the turbulence in the knot of bees at the entrance when there is something going on inside of the hive. Then the sport thought that he had distinguished a woman's voice mixed among the words that reached his ears.

Without delay he hurried along, and just in time for the fun he burst through the throng, and into the room.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE DAUGHTER OF THE STARS.

THE name of the establishment was "Mike's" and as that it was generally known, though it was sometimes spoken of as Hoodlum's Hall. It was kept by a rough man, and it was a rough place. Not that to the casual looker-on it would seem more than an extra rapid location, where "benzine" was downed with wonderful freedom, and money lost and won with a great deal of speed. But there was a larger proportion of bad men among its patrons than any other establishment in town could boast of, and the statistics at the end of the year showed a larger death roll in and around it than all the rest of the saloons could untidily boast of. There was a lot of silk about the surface, and a heap of sin beneath it.

It was a sociable sort of a place, too. If men wanted to sit around, smoking and talking, it was all right. They didn't seem to be in anybody's way; and there was always something going on at odd times, to furnish amusement and something to speak about.

There was a general circulation between the different houses around town, and the news came in early about the game between Colonel Canter and the stranger sport who had signal-

ized his entrance to the town by laying out Jem Hudson, of the Giraffe.

That he was a chief with fists and cards seemed to be pretty clear. Every one knew that Hudson was the most scientific fighter in the camp; while the colonel was not only one of the shining lights at draw, and all other games of chance, but he was supposed to be the most competent of men to size up the real strength of an opponent's game. Unless he felt he was clearly overmatched he would probably have stuck to the stranger a while longer. His wallet might be emptied, but the manager and part owner of the Golden Stream would not have to beg long for a loan; even if he did not just then have a comfortable balance in the bank. The question that remained open for discussion was, whether this Hurrah Harry could hold his own with lead or steel if put to the test, as he probably would be if he continued long to ruffle around Hard Pan.

Of course the games went on all the same, and all that part of the house devoted to chance was not yet bothering itself about these subjects; this was in the saloon part of the building, and the region round about the bar.

There was an unusually numerous attendance this evening, and for awhile they found the subject just what was wanted to fill in the time between drinks. It began to pall on their appetites at length; and just at the time when the little knots were beginning to yawn for something else, but had not yet broken up, there was the tinkle of a tambourine from the vicinity of the door.

That brought every glance in that direction, and the sight presented aroused the enthusiasm of the entire assembly.

Holding her shivering, quivering tambourine above her head, a beautiful girl floated across the floor as far as the center of the room, a way opening for her as the crowd, by common consent cleared the space.

Her appearance was a surprise to the house, for she had never been seen in Hard Pan before; but the floor was granted to her by unanimous consent, and a low murmur of applause.

She was tall, but so exquisitely proportioned that no one thought so unless he happened to compare her with some ordinary-sized men who happened to stand in range. Every motion was grace itself, and nature never made a lovelier mold than that in which the rounded, tapering arms were fashioned. Her hands were dainty, and her tiny feet, visible beneath the short-skirted dress that she wore, were slender, and high arched in the instep. With her full lips parted, so that her ivory teeth flashed between them, and her royal head poised in a listening attitude, she stood a moment, while a clapping of hands spoke a loud greeting.

It was then her audience noted for the first time the darkness of her complexion. There seemed to be a rich bloom on her cheeks, and yet when closely viewed it shaded off into almost purple, while the rest of her face and her arms were too dark for a pure Caucasian, without being exactly suggestive of Mexican or Indian blood. Possibly there might be a mixture of blood and races here, to produce the highest type of beauty in all.

But all speculation in regard to this was lost in admiration, as the girl drifted away from the center of the floor in a graceful dance, to the sound of her own tambourine.

It was wonderful what music her hands, with no seeming effort, could bring from the barbarously simple instrument. It sung a dreamy song, it rose into a triumphant chorus, it tinkled and it clanged, until its hearers doubted if there was not some delusion behind it; and all the while the dancer's swaying form and twinkling feet kept true time to its rhythm.

Then the dance ceased, and with a gliding, undulatory motion she approached the nearest table, at which three men remained sitting just as when she entered.

They were all three of the better-dressed class, though their faces showed that they belonged to the order of hawks, and one of them was dark enough to be of kin to the dancer. He sat on the further side of the table, facing her, and, as she drew near, his black eyes sparkled as they roved over her face and form. He was a dangerous man was this Don Silvio Mercedo; and to no one more dangerous than a girl like this.

Nearer to the dancer sat a well-known gambler, Dan Clare by name, who had watched the performance for what it was worth, and was heaving a sigh of satisfaction while his hand sought his pocket in search of a coin commensurate with the display.

"Sorry, miss, that I am a little down on my luck," he said, as he extended a five-dollar gold-piece toward the tambourine she held in her right hand. "It will hardly do either of us justice; but, it's the best I can do."

She shook her head with the most charming of smiles.

"It is not for gold that the poor Indian girl would do that. It is part of her life, is music and motion. Even so poor an instrument as this can be made to answer to the soul that strikes it. But Poncho Poncho is a daughter of the stars, and can read from the hand that crosses hers with silver or with gold all that has

been, all that is, and all that will be. Afraid to test her skill in the magic lore?"

"Scarcely afraid; but, I'd sooner pay good money for what I can see, than run the risks on what I know nothing about. Take the coin and tell us something about Delain, or the captain there, Don Silvio."

"If thou hadst always been that wise, Hard Pan would not now be holding thee," answered the girl, accepting the coin, but, by a quick dart of her other hand, obtaining possession of his fingers, to give a hasty glance at the palms she turned upward. "Thou hast thrown away thy life for what thou didst not see. Shall I tell thee all thy past, to prove my art is something that can be known about?"

"Scarcely. There are some things about it, as you well might guess, that I do not care to be reminded of, and Hard Pan knows the present as well as I do. For the future, what can you promise me but a long life, a handsome wife, and gold by the bushel?"

Whether it was the magnetic touch of those shapely fingers, or because he did not care to flinch before those that were bending eagerly forward to listen, his hand lay quietly in hers while she followed its strongly marked lines.

"A happy home, such as this desolate region never saw the like of, a yellow-haired girl, as beautiful as the dawn, a black-eyed rival, a thrust of the knife, a terrible mistake, years of useless wandering, a woman alone, wealth beyond your wishes, crying that there is no reason why you should not come back for me—these are the things you know nothing about, save for my art. And you throw them all away for sake of things that you do."

Her arm rose as she closed, and she gave a sweeping gesture of contempt around the saloon, lingering for a moment as she pointed to the bar.

"Heavens, woman! Can you have guessed all that? Is it all true; or have you mingled fact and fancy? Tell me truly. If it is a fable, I forgive you for the sake of the good it has done me, and if it is the truth, I'll make that coin a hundred times as valuable by to-morrow noon, if I sell my mines for a song."

"The daughter of the stars never lies. If it is worth anything to hear the truth, I am glad, but thou hast paid me once and for all."

She had dropped his hand; now she passed on to the next.

Chet Delain was an older bird, and the little scene was a warning. There were plenty of unpleasant things in his past life that might be guessed at, and if there really was anything in this—and Chet was inclined to be superstitious—something might be blurted out that would do damage without remedy. He drew back with a scowl that a moment before he would not have believed he could have found for so beautiful a creature.

"I've no silver or gold, and you can just consider that I have bunched my cards and jumped the game. Try the Don, here. He's had plenty of past to talk about, and nerve enough to hear it all. I'm modest."

The smile with which Silvio looked up at her showed his white teeth—fairly matches for her own.

"My hand, and heart," he whispered, holding out a twenty-dollar gold-piece on his palm.

"Make the worst of them."

"Thy heart is not as large as the coin, and surely not worth so much, but thy hand is a stout one, whether to close in the dark on the throat of a man or on the shoulder of a woman. Is it thy past, present or future that troubles thee most? There is a dark shadow on them all."

"Thou didst better for Dan Clare, for a quarter of the money—curse the shivery fool, he's left the room! For the past I care not a fig; for the present you and I can only know that I am thy not very humble adorer. Tell me of the future only, then, and how this is to end."

"The gallows for thee when thou hast robbed Pedro Mercator's house, and slain him on the threshold, as thy plans now point, unless, indeed—"

She spoke in so low a tone that none but Chet Delain could hear, but her words sounded like a clap of thunder, and brought him to his feet with a bound.

"Carejo! Thou knowest too much. The stars never told thee that; thou hast been prying and peering—and for thine own hurt. Who are you? Speak, and speak quickly. One who cometh to the Hall to give air to secrets such as those is too apt to go out feet foremost. Speak! Is it to be more than peace, or less than war between us?"

"The peace of Zimri, who slew his master. Such would be the peace that thou wouldst have. Take thy hand from me. He dies who insults the daughter of the stars."

Perhaps he had been quicker than she credited him with being. In his first surprise he had caught her wrist in an iron gripe, and seemingly held her powerless while he glared down into her face. It was only for the moment that he so far lost his self-possession, and before she had finished her threat, he was himself again.

"Give over thy nonsense; thou hast tried me and found me wanting in nerve, but it shall not



happen again. Those lips were never made to give such bitter sting. So near to mine I would kiss them if I died for it."

He uttered the truth for once, though he meant it not. He had never let go of her arm; now, in his momentary madness, his other arm went around her waist, and he drew her toward him till his lips hung just above hers, and began to settle slowly down.

Then, while some clapped their hands in senseless applause, and others cried shame, he cast her from him, and staggered back, his hand fumbling for a weapon.

#### CHAPTER IX.

##### WAR WITH THE KNIFE.

THE cause of the sudden discomfiture of Don Silvio was left no mystery. In her hand the girl still held a dagger, and its point was dimmed with the blood it had drawn from the Mexican's veins. So quickly had she used it that no one saw it drawn, and it was only because Mercedo's left hand was so convulsively clasped to his breast that the spectators could believe that serious damage had been done.

Shameful as had been his treatment of the tambourinist the tide of sympathy was ready to turn, when, after a brief silence he thickly mumbled:

"Heavens—cut—ah—revenge!"

Weakly he drew his knife and staggered toward the girl, who did not hesitate to meet him.

"Hold on, there; hold on!" cried Chet Delain, loyal to his pard for one thing: and looking to what seemed his own interests for another. As he spoke he darted behind the female, seized her uplifted wrist with no tender grasp, and wrenched the dagger from her fingers, leaving her with no defense save her bare hands against Silvio's attack.

And there was death in the Mexican's face, as she could see at a glance. His weakness was a ruse, to deceive the bystanders, and the insult at least partly of the same nature. From the moment of her revelation he had feared her; and those that Silvio feared most often felt his knife.

Silvio knew that there were a dozen men there that he could count on, and risked, or tried to risk, the rope for the sake of quieting the beautiful holder of his secrets. He doubted if outsiders would interfere until his work was done, and then they might go hang—so long as it was not he.

The men that he could count on crowded around. If he struck a blow no one else would see it, and for them he did not care. Poncho Poncho, with arms folded, simply looked him in the face.

All this took little time; but it gave a chance for Hurrah Harry to arrive. He had not lingered on the threshold, nor did he pause when within the room. To this way and to that he flung the men that blocked his way, and as he stepped in distance his fist shot out.

"Sorry to contradict you, pard, but that's a woman I see in front of you. If I've made a mistake I'm willing to apologize to the crowd, and give you all the satisfaction that the biggest kind of a chief could call for. What's going on here, anyhow?"

If he had struck as hard as he had when he was dealing with the Highbinders, Don Silvio would not have been in condition to ask for satisfaction, or anything else. But as he was only going into the fracas on instinct he left room to apologize after his own peculiar way in case he was interfering on the wrong side.

Nevertheless, there was nothing put on this time when the Don staggered back, to be caught in the arms of a friend. It was luck only that he did not show his measure on the floor.

As Silvio had been mingling for so many years with the Americans, he was not altogether unfamiliar with the art pugilistic; but he never fought his battles that way. Once solidly on his feet again and he forgot the simulated weakness he had so lately been showing, and knife in hand darted at Harry like a wild-cat.

As it was not certain that more of the crowd would come with him, the High Horse from Halcyon threw his arms around him to clear a way, and then sprung back until he almost touched the wall, while into his hand came a revolver. He could have made things warm for Silvio as he closed in, but he did not intend to fire unless it seemed to be necessary for his protection against numbers. At the same time he did not care to use his fists against the knife in the hand of the Mexican.

"Say, some one lend me a knife, will you? I left mine at home, and I don't care about shooting this poor, miserable excuse of a woman-stabber, until he has a chance to say his prayers. But if it is fun you want, I think you can have a heap while I am getting him ready for a bed of repentance and a couch of pain. It has been a long time since I had a chance at a regular ripper from Mexico, and I want to see how much my hand is out for the business."

While he spoke Harry coolly parried the thrusts of the other with the barrel of his pistol, his left hand dropped in his side pocket after his

usual careful style when there was a chance for sudden and unforeseen danger. He managed to keep his eyes about him, too, and so saw Dad Horner holding his knife by the blade, the handle toward him, and debating whether he could place it in his hands without making himself too conspicuous to the friends of the Don whom he recognized in the crowd.

Harry understood his modesty, and was not offended by it. He ward off a vicious lunge, and then rapped Silvio sharply on the temple with the barrel of his revolver. That gave him time to step back and sideways and snatch the knife from Horner's hand.

Silvio knew his own skill, and was too angry to speculate much upon that of his adversary; but the spectators had their opinions, and when the knife appeared in the hands of the sport a word or two of Dad Horner's produced a readiness to back them that gave Hurrah Harry a better chance than a stranger usually had when he picked a fracas with one of Mike's regular patrons.

"That's my knife ther sport has, and my money talks loud that he lays ther Greaser out," shouted Dad, producing his wallet, and shaking it at the men that were edging up.

"He's ther boss cutter from Gilt Edge, an' thar's ten good dollars ov my money dyin' ter be kivered tell some one kin show me I'm tellin' a lie."

Dad Horner was well enough known, and when he offered to bet his money was covered, and in addition a dozen other bets were made, as rapidly as men could talk. Silvio had his backers through thick and thin, but there were others who reasoned that if the sport could hold his own with a pistol for a knife, what could he not do when he held a blade in his hand.

"Fair play, you!" shouted the men who had risked their money on the stranger, as they saw that there was a gang bunched together as if for a rush.

"Give 'em room according, and let the best man win. If there's any crowding, somebody will be hurt. Go it, you cripples!"

To make sure that their warnings would not be slighted, these men drew their own weapons, and in an instant there was a cordon of ring-keepers, all of them men with whom it was not safe to trifle.

The blow on his temple had momentarily dazed the Mexican, who crouched back as though for a spring, yet did not at once move. There was thus a little time given for these outside arrangements, and it was only after they were all made that Silvio made another rush.

Up, down and around his knife played, feinting and thrusting, guarding and parrying. At last he was awake to the fact that he had a dangerous customer to deal with, and that it would take all of his strength and skill to dispose of him.

But once on even terms and Hurrah Harry seemed perfectly at his ease. He looked his furious antagonist over with a contemptuous smile, and lazily played with him. How he parried those rapid thrusts was a mystery, for his arm scarcely moved and his wrist turned lazily to this side or that. Once or twice he appeared to invite a thrust, as he left himself exposed; but though the Don savagely took advantage of the openings, thrusting with what his friends thought was irresistible fury, for once he found that he had a man in front of him that was always there.

Then—the spectators saw the knife drawn back; but how was the stroke made? No one had seen it; only, when the sport threw himself on guard again the blood was streaming from an ugly slash across the Mexican's brow.

"The man that takes him for a maverick now deserves all he gets," said Harry, as he saw the Mexican dash away the blood with the hand that was empty.

"I have my mark on him, and if I don't kill him now it's because his pelt ain't prime, and won't fetch its value in the market. He thought it was fun amazing to deal with a woman; but when it's a real, live man he has on his hands he finds that he's only small potatoes with a knife, and most blame few in a hill."

The Don was baffled, but not beaten. Like a tiger he began to steal around the sport, crouching low as the king of the jungle crouches, once or twice threatening to launch himself with a bound but as often recovering himself to continue his stealthy round.

"What's the little imp got in him now?" asked Harry, leaning back and surveying him with a sarcastically thoughtful air.

"I never saw the man that couldn't teach me something, but who would expect a new wrinkle out of him? Don't waste time, but let's have it before something happens. I can't waste the evening fooling with a man of your caliber."

Harry was right in suspecting that Silvio was about to try some trick of his own—and all these Mexican knife-fighters have wile or artifice of their own in reserve for such an emergency. What Silvio's was developed with startling suddenness. Without the least warning by eye or motion he hurled himself at the sport, and thrust at his throat, following with a slash at his waist with a knife that had just appeared in his left hand.

"Not this evening, Johnny Doubleknife," ex-

claimed the man from Halcyon, tossing aside the one stroke and evading the other by a dexterous twist of his body.

"If that's the best you have in the shop, why, down you go!"

A cry of rage and dismay arose from the backers of the Mexican as they saw the hand of the sport dash forward in a stroke to which there was no parry, and Don Silvio throw up his hands in a vain effort to balance himself as he was hurled violently to the floor.

They were mistaken about its being a death-stroke, though. It was the knuckles of the High Horse that went home, backed by the weight of the knife, and though they cut to the bone, yet the Mexican was far from being a dead man yet, as the grunt he gave testified, when Harry dropped on him with his knees, shaking his knife in his face.

"Now, little man, beg or croak. I'm the High Horse from Halcyon, and I don't want to foul my hands with your dirty life, but I'm going to see that you do one or the other. I'm tired playing at knife with a man that can't furnish common amusement, and if I hit you again you'll think you have always been knocked down. I'll just lay these toohpicks aside to give you time to consider your latter end. When you think you are ready to take the jump in the dark you can get them and go to work again."

Dexterously he wrenched the knives from the hands of the prostrate man, and flung them one after the other at the wall. They hit fairly on their points, and hung quivering, just in reach from the floor.

The capture of his weapons took all the remaining fight out of the Don—to say nothing of the fact that his eyes were so nearly closed that he could but barely see his antagonist, and their condition was rapidly growing worse. Yet his tongue was not conquered. As he rose to his feet he venomously hissed:

"Fool! Thou hast exposed thyself! There is but one man living in all this region who might best Silvio Mercedo with a knife, and that is Captain Cowl. The villain! thief! robber! murderer! the King of the Cows! Seize him! 'Tis a thousand dollars' reward!"

"Oh, come, you hit me where I live. If you can trot out King Cowl we'll shake hands and call it square, for he's the very identical daisy I'm after myself."

#### CHAPTER X.

##### A GRATEFUL GIRL.

THE announcement of the two men created some excitement—that of Hurrah Harry the most. In truth, it was entirely misunderstood, since the moment it was made popular opinion at Mike's jumped to the conclusion that this wonderful fighter was nothing more or less than a detective who had visited Hard Pan in the pursuit of his human game.

There was a temporary silence while this idea was being digested. Then came a response from the outer edge of the crowd.

"An' it's a thousand Oi'll bate yez that ye don't git him, at all, at all."

It was Mike himself that was was talking, and from the tone of his voice he was not in the best of humors.

The challenge was heard by the sport, and he did not trouble himself about the misconception, if, indeed, he noticed it.

"Done for the thousand, and I'll book it before you have time to take water. A thousand goes; now, what's the bet about? It's play or pay with me, and I always like to know when I have my money won."

"A thousand even that ye don't bring in Captain Cowl, did or alove, widin a raysonable period."

"All right; I'll bring him in within three weeks, and you can keep him. Put up your tin with Pedro Mercator, any time to-morrow, and you'll find that mine is waiting for you there now. Our little friend here ought to be smacked for reeling off that nonsense, but I don't like to kick a cripple. When his eyes get out of mourning he can come for me again, and I'll put that in the job, and finish it all together."

"An' it's sure ye are that Pedro Mercator wad be havin' d'alain's wid the loikes ov you, at all?"

"I'll put up my check for five thousand against your hard coin, and if you win and he don't honor it, you can break my neck. Or, I'll put up five hundred that he acts as stakeholder, and says that he has my money now."

With some show of indignation, Harry produced a little handful of money and began to count it out.

"Howld on!" interrupted Mike. "Oi'll take yer worrud fur it that ye know him better than Oi do. Oi'm only bettin' on ther sure thing. An' now, b'yes, the toime fur yer diversions is over, an' the house goes back to business. Av ye interfare wid it ag'in, it's himsilf ye'll be havin' ter d'ale wid. Jontlemin, ther bank's open, an' ther flyer is ther half ov foive hundred, wid four fur one on ther tourn. Come fur me av ye wants to doie happy."

At Mike's strong hint, the floor was speedily cleared. The room was not vacated, but there was a strong current formed toward the faro-



table, and those who took no interest in the game separated into knots, such as were scattered around before the entrance of the beautiful tambourinist.

What had become of her no one knew. She was standing near during the fight with knives; but when the victory was once assured to the stranger sport, she suddenly vanished. Of course no one thought that she disappeared in anything but a natural way; but somehow no one saw her go.

Hurrah Harry was of course able to make himself at home with the crowd after the send-off that he had received, and though there were enough who scowled as they looked, there were others who were willing enough to make friends with a sport who had so highly signalized his entrance to the town. If the Mexican had been able to remain, it is more than likely there would have been more trouble, in spite of the warning of the proprietor; but immediately after his outburst, his friends had gathered around him, and with the hint that the cause of the affray had made good her escape, and that his remaining might only cause his death when he was in no condition to take care of himself, had forced him away, not without many low-growled threats about the vengeance that was to come at some future time.

And if Mike expected to rope Harry into his game, he found that he was mistaken. The sport patronized the bar liberally for the benefit of the house, made the acquaintance of a number of the men who belonged in Hard Pan, and then quietly took his departure. Dad Horner and his pard, having received a quiet hint, followed a few moments later.

As he more than half expected that Don Silvio or some of his henchmen would be lying in wait for him, the sport kept his eye well about, and held himself ready to promptly meet any attack. Not a thing did he see of the Mexican; but before he had gone many paces a light hand tapped him on the arm.

Although he had not suspected that any one was so near, he gave no start, but turned his head slowly sideways. There was no haste, since, if the party had meant harm, the damage would have been done without notice; and then he had a strong suspicion of who it was.

Nor was he mistaken. At his elbow he found the beautiful tambourinist; though now she was draped with a long cloak that entirely concealed her peculiar costume, and on her head she wore a broad-brimmed, white felt hat. Knowing nothing of her beforehand, and at a little distance, one might not have distinguished her sex with a single glance.

Harry was not deceived, however, and raised his hat as he gave a courtly bow.

"The daughter of the stars would thank thee for thy kindness. It is not every man—no, nor one in a thousand—that would care to champion Poncho Poncho, in a crowd like that, which would see a woman done to death and never lift a hand—even when there were two to one in the unfair game. Oh, you are a man among men, and I would know thy name, so that some day I or mine can repay thee, in part at least, for what thou has done for me."

"No thanks, little one. I had all the fun, and thou all the fear. They gave fair play in spite of themselves, and that is all I ask anywhere. I don't ask that if I know the double team is coming. Let it stand as it is. Hurrah Harry don't work for thanks or profit. He is always ready to chip in when a woman needs his help, and for the rest he's getting a heap of fun out of life as he goes along, and what more than that could he ask?"

"All men are not like thee; and if I went away like a churl, never thanking thee for what thou knowest was no little risk or favor thou wouldst not forget it. Our sex is at best but ungrateful, as perhaps thou hast already found, and it will tire thee soon enough in doing them unthanked favors."

"I guess the sex has treated me better than I deserved. When I forget my manners my luck will run out and I'll die anyhow, so where's the difference? If I can be of any further service name it. If not—this is no safe place for you to be loitering at this hour of the night, and I will bid you good-evening."

"One place is as safe as another to me. Like thee, I am protected by my star. It brought thee to my aid to-night; and it tells me that henceforth our two lives will in something run together. I have asked if I could do nothing for thee. Think again. This outlaw—Captain Cowl—didst thou truly come to Hard Pan on quest of him?"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Harry. "I never heard of him before; but I'm the High Horse from Halcyon, and at all they show me in the ring. Mike misunderstood me, but life is too short to waste time in explaining such trifles. I wanted to meet a better man with the knife, but if there's no other way to show what I intended I can bring him in—and the odds are about ten to one that I turn him loose again. I never imagined myself cut out for a bloodhound of the law. I couldn't sleep half so sound after two or three of my captures had been throttled, and I had the blood-money in my pocket."

"It is dangerous work that thou hast under-

taken. If Captain Cowl did not hear thy boast it is fair to say that some of his friends were there. Others have sought him, and never come back. They were not such men as thou, but they were neither fools nor cowards. Perhaps I may be able to aid thee some. He is here to-day, a hundred miles away to-morrow. It is not where he is now that you must find; but the spot to reach him in the future. And that Poncho Poncho may be able to find out and tell thee, if thou wilt accept such favor at her poor hands. How is it? Wilt thou listen if I send thee word?"

"Hope I know my catechism well enough not to refuse to promise you that. At the same time I don't care to drag a woman into such affairs. Some of these bad men sometimes come out ahead, and pay off all scores, to the third and fourth generation."

"I run my risks; and I swear that if anything happens to you from this King of the Cows it will be amply repaid. Farewell for a season. When we meet again I will have something to tell thee."

She held out her hand, and warm and tender it dropped into that of the sport, where it lingered for a moment. When Harry departed without a single backward glance she remained gazing after him as long as he was in sight.

"A strange man," she muttered, "and one fit to mate with a daughter of the stars. What evil wind of destiny blew him my way?"

She started as she saw two figures slouch past her, so near that they might almost have overheard her murmured words. They were following straight on the trail of the sport, and there was an evil in their very gait that betrayed them as the night vultures that they were.

"Bunting!"

She uttered the name in a sibilant whisper, that was barely loud enough to reach the ears for which it was intended.

At the sound the two halted like soldiers to the order, and without hesitation or fear the girl advanced toward them.

She held her arms up, and thrust out from under the cloak, while her hands made a motion or two that they could see, even in that uncertain light.

As she approached they bent their heads in a respectful attitude, and said never a word.

"Hark you," she addressed them, with a sharp ring in her voice that Hurrah Harry would have scarcely recognized.

"I have seen you in the company of yonder man, if I mistake not, acting as his pretended friends. Beware of treachery. Leave him to fight his own battles if you choose—I think it would take better men than you to follow where he may lead—but lay hands on him yourselves, or attempt to betray him, and there will be a settlement such as you do not even dream of."

"Bless your soul, miss," answered Baby Bunting, in undisguised astonishment, "we've had our whack at him, and it didn't pan out fur a cent. Then he took us around town ter see ther sights, an' when he said ter come it mought not hev bin just so elegant ter try ter stay. An' he's a good, solid man, so, when ther rest ov ther gang wanted ter try it over, we bluffed 'em right from ther rattles, an' made out we'd stick by him till he got through the crowd. We told him we wouldn't go back on our pards, though; an' he said that war hunkey-dory. We're keepin' eyes out fur that infernal Greaser an' his friends, now, an' ef they show up thar will be music. That's ther hull gospel, an' we'll both swear to it."

"Then it is well. If thou seest Colonel Canter, and can give him the message privately, tell him he has forgotten; some one else may forget. Pass on, and remember."

She drew the cloak once more closely around her and watched the two forms fading away in the night.

## CHAPTER XI. DOUBLE DANGER.

HURRAH HARRY had certainly managed to improve his time very well during the few hours he had been in Hard Pan, and though the midnight chicken had as yet failed to crow it was somewhere near the hour when churchyards are supposed to yawn. In consideration of the fact that he had taken a long tramp that day, and that there was no telling when he would find a better opportunity, he determined to give himself a rest for the balance of the night, unless his body-guard might have something particularly amusing to suggest.

He had seen Bunting and his pard lurking near during his interview with the girl-woman who called herself the daughter of the stars; and expected them to follow immediately upon his separating from her. Their delay, brief though it was, troubled him, and he was just on the point of turning back to see if they had molested her, when the two Highbinders made their appearance.

"Began to think that you were trying to give me the slip, or had stopped to talk nonsense with that young lady. There wouldn't have been a bit of profit in either performance. Who is she, by the way? Does she live around here? And what sort of a place is Mike's, that a bound

like that Mexican could offer violence to a woman without having the house on his back?"

"It's a purty bad sort ov a place, an' that's a fact. But yer see thar war plenty knew ther Don an' his gang, an' nobody ez ever seen ther gal afore. Mike hed bin out, but he war jest a-sailin' along with a switch in his hand when you chipped. Reckon he intended ter stop ther racket; but thar's no tellin'."

"She was a stranger in the camp like myself, then?" said Harry, reflectively. "Well, you don't want to bother with such strangers, and don't you forget it, when I'm around. I played light to-night, for I wasn't sure of the ground, but I have the measure of the bad men of Hard Pan down fine, and if I have to chip in a case like that again, I'll be apt to come for keeps. You two don't seem to be the worst ruffians in the world. If I need you, could I count on you to act square? And where can I find you?"

"We won't help ter go back on old pards by givin' a stranger pints, but when we say we'll stay with yer, you kin count on havin' us there."

"Speshully if it pays," threw in Dad Horner, who did not intend that Baby Bunting should do all the talking.

"You'll find when I ask a man to work for me I mean to pay him for all he does. Here's a little souvenir for the night's proceedings, and if you haven't any address that you care to have a man of my size know, suppose you report at Hudson's to-morrow evening, and I'll let you know if you are needed. You can file off, now. I don't think the Don's friends will show up, and I won't need you to let me know if I am hitting at the right men."

Hudson had not yet retired, and seemed surprised to see the sport in at so comparatively an early hour, but he showed the sport to bed without comment or question; and heard the history of what had occurred from some one else.

By the next morning there were very few of the inhabitants of the town who had not heard of the High Horse from Halcyon, and the remarkable way in which he had begun the conquest of the town.

If Hurrah Harry, had seen Miss Blanche Bartram the following morning, as she sat at her leisure in the parlor of her father's residence, it is doubtful if he would have recognized her. Dripping and drowning damsels are not generally renowned for good looks, and up to the time of their separation Blanche had by no means recovered her self-possession. Even when she had reached her home and was telling her story to her father, she was much excited, and showed it more plainly than when she had to repress her feelings before the stranger who had done her such good service.

Jason listened to her with a troubled face.

His worry was twofold. Now that this thing had begun it was not so certain when or where it was to end. The ruffians might come back when there was no Hurrah Harry, or any one else to come to her aid.

At the same time he was sorry to be under any obligation to this wandering stranger, of whom he could form something of an idea from the very vivid description Miss Blanche gave of her double rescue.

The next morning he was more troubled still. The news of Harry's game with Colonel Canter was all over town, as well as the subsequent affray at Hoodlum Hall, and Jason Bartram heard it before breakfast. Had the story of the adventure with the Highbinders been added the account would have been still more thrilling, but of that not a word was said. For obvious reasons the rogues preferred to keep silent in regard to their failure, and Hurrah Harry did not mention it.

"It was just as I feared," said Jason to his fair young daughter. "Your gallant rescuer turns out to be a gambler of the first water, and a brawling, fighting, terrible sort of a tough besides. He won some four or five thousand dollars at cards, after he left you, and then had a stabbing affray, in which a woman was concerned, in one of the lowest gambling dens in the town. It is unfortunate that he could not take decent care of his reputation, because I would like to show my gratitude in some way, and now it is hardly possible to do so, in any public way at least, for fear of mixing his name up with yours. Should he ever address you, pray refer him to me. Perhaps we can find some way to show that we are not ungrateful, without seriously compromising ourselves."

Miss Blanche said, "Certainly, papa," and drooped her eyes demurely. When he had mentioned the woman as the cause of the fracas at the gambling den he had taken the best means he possibly could to cause his daughter to let the dashing stranger severely alone; how could he know that the young lady was not satisfied in her own mind with his version of the story, and was filled with a desire to learn more of its merits. If he had not by intimation led her to believe that the winning was also done at Mike's, and if he had mentioned Colonel Canter as the unfortunate antagonist at the card table, she might have been more curious still. The gallant colonel was not altogether a stranger in



the Bartram residence; and to one of the inmates he was not a welcome one.

So, some time after breakfast, Miss Blanche called into council her abigail, who was also a damsel of divers duties in the Bartram family, and who was already in possession of the main facts in regard to the rescue at the river. As Jason had taken himself off to his office, there was nothing to prevent this girl from being dispatched in search of information; and pending her return Miss Blanche unfortunately passed the time in a sort of day-dream in which the dashing stranger was a prominent character.

The name of the messenger was Fanny French. She was a girl of rather more than average intelligence, and a romantic turn of mind. She was dispatched with the understanding that she was to seek information from the clerk of the store whence the most of the supplies used in the Bartram residence were drawn. In her own mind she had fully decided that she would have a glimpse of the hero before returning.

In the first place, though, she sought the store, and while making a few purchases asked certain questions that speedily opened up a mine of information.

"News! You bet there is news," said Tommy Patterson, with enthusiasm. "There has a new sport struck the camp, and oh, but he's a daisy. Bluffed old Canter way out of sight. Won all his loose cash and then shook half a million at him and offered to match coppers with him for it against his share in the Golden Stream. Oh, it was good for sore eyes, the way he raked him from end to end. And then, as he was going home, with his pockets just bulging out with the boodle he had captured, he heard a woman screaming, in at Mike's. It was a little girl that travels round with her blind father, telling fortunes, and a yellow dog of a Mexican that hangs 'round there with his gang insulted her, and was going to cut her heart out with a knife because she slapped his face. There wasn't a man there that dared to interfere, because he's such a dandy with the knife and has such a gang of bad men behind him. But this sport, he just jumped in with his bare hands, and he laid him out so stiff you could have cut him up into whalebone, and backed down Mike and all the gang when they talked about chipping. That's the sort of a rooster he is, and he's come here to regulate this camp, and make it fit for a white man to live in. And they do say there will be a dozen men laying for him to-night, and if he can't shoot a perfect stream he's bound to go out of the wet; but I'm laying out my duckats on the stranger, every time."

At Fanny's request he supplemented this very reliable account with a full, and not remarkably inaccurate description of the sport, and was altogether so interested in the report that he forgot to charge in the bill several little sundries that he added for the especial use of Miss French herself.

Leaving the store Miss Fanny thought that it would not be much further to take in the Giraffe on her way home. As she passed the hotel she narrowly scanned its doors and windows in search of the face of Tommy Patterson's description.

She could see nothing of the kind, and continued her course homeward in a state bordering on disgust.

Then, when she had given up, chance struck in and aided her to some purpose. As she stepped along beyond the building that had concealed from view what was going on ahead and to the right, a man suddenly caught her by the shoulders and hastily urged her back.

"Excuse me, miss," he said, respectfully but firmly, as he hurried her along.

"I'm a judge of such things and those fellows are awful careless. I don't think it's safe for you to try to go by there until that blast is over. If they have a full charge in it will blow their covering to kingdom come, and take the neighborhood along with it. I wouldn't hurry for myself; but the sex feminine must be protected. Ah, I reckon the danger is over now, and you can proceed on your way without fear."

The sound of a tremendous explosion caused Miss Fanny to utter a scream of terror, in spite of the reassuring words of the gentleman, who was certainly keeping himself between her and the danger.

Then she saw with a shiver that a volley of rocks, boulders, and logs had swept over the very spot where she would probably have been had not this stranger drawn her back out of harm's way. The sight made her sick, and there was nothing feigned in the limp and nerveless way she drooped over into his arms.

"Oh, come now, a miss is as good as a mile, and you are as good as two of them. Try a foot-race, won't you? A dollar to a dime that I beat you to the road that leads up to Jason Bartram's!"

"How did you know?" began Fanny. Then she looked sharply into the handsome face that was so near her own.

"You must be the gentleman they call Hurrah Harry, who was so brave in defense of Miss Blanche last night. I have wanted to see you so much! And then, how noble for you to take

the part of that little girl, when no one else dared to move to her rescue. Oh, if you had lived in the olden times you would have been a grand knight-errant. I don't wonder that Miss Blanche is so loud in your praises, and so much afraid that she did not thank you enough last night. When she was half-drowned, how could she? You are certainly going to call at the house, are you not, Mr. Harry?"

## CHAPTER XII.

### HIGHBINDER AT PLAY.

ONCE her tongue fairly going, and Fanny was able to rattle on fast enough. She was so much interested on Miss Bertram's account, that for the time she forgot herself and her late danger. Harry saw this, and smiled as he recalled it to her.

"I don't think that Mr. Bartram is yearning to form my acquaintance, and the young lady said all that the case admitted of, so that there is really no excuse for my making my appearance there. I judge that you are one of the inmates, and I can take the occasion to inquire if the young lady is any the worse for her bath in the river. I do not know that it is necessary for you to apprise her that I did so, however."

"Not a bit. You got her out so beautifully that it was a real pleasure to have fallen in. I know she would tell you the same."

"Thanks for your kindness in saying so, but I expect there are other gentlemen in Hard Pan that she would far rather see."

"Not that Colonel Canter that you plucked so nicely last night. She can't bear the sight of him, and I wonder that Mr. Bartram will have him around. I guess it is business, but I pity the poor man if he has much to do with that Canter."

"So do I, my child. He is decidedly a bad man from 'way back. But I am sorry to say that I must bid you good-morning. I have several business engagements, and I think besides that it is my bounden duty to go back and punch the heads of the man or men that set off that blast."

Without intending it Harry thus brought her back to her own late danger, that she had been entirely overlooking. As he at once became triply heroic in the eyes of the romantic Fanny he had to endure a full line of thanks on her own account, and so he strolled along until almost in view of Bartram's before he turned and left her.

The interview was certainly not one of his own seeking, and it was destined to produce fruit such as neither of them expected at the time.

In the course of the morning Harry looked over the town pretty well, without meeting with any further adventure. He did not make good his threat to punch the heads of the men who fired the blast perhaps because he did not find any heads on which to exercise his pugilistic skill. He made a circuit before passing the spot again, and by that time some one else had taken the contract off his hands, or the men had grown weary and left.

When he reached the Giraffe again it was near dinner time.

"Back haygain, hey?" said Hudson, bustling in out of the dining-room.

"Just him time for the mail has a little kid brung."

He handed Harry a letter, which was securely sealed, and addressed on the outside in a bold, masculine handwriting, at which Jem looked curiously as he handed the epistle over. It was one that he had never seen before, and Hudson thought that he was familiar with the fist of every man in camp that would be likely to write as well as that.

He was made none the wiser, however; for Harry discreetly turned away as he slowly removed the envelope and glanced at the contents.

Inside, the writing was of a totally different style, being delicately feminine; and this was the way it read:

"MY DEAR SIR:—

"If you are still in the humor to follow up the matter you spoke of, and will come to 'The Shivered Pine' an hour before sunset, I think I can give you information that will be of use to you."

"THE DAUGHTER OF THE STARS."

"Humph! She loses no time," thought the sport. "I don't know that there is any such great rush, for there is a long three weeks to finish up the job, but as it is a lady that wants to talk I may as well hear what she has to say, if I can find my way to the spot. From the way she mentions the trysting place I judge it is well known, and I'm not too modest to inquire."

He put the letter in his pocket and went in to his dinner. He had hardly made up for the time lost on the road. His appetite was still sharp set.

After the meal was over he lounged about for a while, smoking a cigar. When Hudson came out on the porch a little later, and attempted to open a conversation, he found the sport in the best of humors, and ready to ask all manner of questions in regard to the town and its environs.

Looney Lum, for whom Harry first inquired,

was out, prospecting somewhere in the mountains; and would not return before evening.

Finally, Harry asked in a casual manner where the Shivered Pine was, that he had heard some one mention as a landmark.

It proved, from the host's description, to be something like four miles out of town.

"You go south till you pass the Golden Stream, and then take the first trail to the right. Follow it until you come to three big boulders. You will see the Shivered Pine, then, and a spring that comes out of the ground at its roots. They say the spot is haunted after dark, but I guess it's a yarn made up on account of three men as were killed there one night by some claim-jumpers. I never met the man that had seen anything of the ghosts. And they don't travel by daylight."

That was the substance of what Hudson had to tell, and Harry did not encourage him to continue the subject further. He asked some questions about the various mining interests of the place, and kept him at them until some one called him away.

There was plenty of time to reach the spot on foot, and the sport decided that he would in that way attract less attention than if he procured a horse. He strolled away from the Giraffe as though he had no especial destination, and gradually got himself clear of the town.

Until he had nearly reached the Golden Stream, he had quite forgotten that the Colonel Canter with whom he had the bout at cards the previous evening, was its manager. The remembrance, that somehow happened to come to him, awoke a lingering thought that he had not previously noticed. Since he came to think of it, there was something about the colonel that seemed familiar, and yet he could not remember ever to have seen the man before.

"One thing is sure. The gallant soldier has it in for me, large as life," thought the sport, as he glanced over at the shanty at the mouth of the tunnel to the Golden Stream. "I don't suppose that it is because I helped his best girl out of the drink, but that won't make him a bit more genial when he finds it out. He showed mighty bad blood from the moment that the game began—and yet he was his own capper, and roped me into it himself. It would be a joke if he should turn out to be Captain Cowl himself. I would enjoy taking him into camp, and that's a fact."

But the more he thought, the further he seemed from a solution of the mystery, and after a time he gave it up.

After turning aside beyond the Golden Stream, the trail was narrower, rougher, and evidently but little used. On horseback, the balance of his journey would not have been pleasant, and he was glad when it seemed to be nearing its close.

Sure enough, there were the three boulders, and the pine tree with a spring at its roots. He was at the trysting place; but as he glanced around he noted by the position of the sun that he was fully half an hour too soon, and that unless the lady anticipated the time set in her epistle, he might as well settle himself for a spell of waiting.

Accordingly he cast himself down under the trunk of the Shivered Pine, alongside of the spring, and let his eyes rove carelessly up and down the trail. It was no particular anxiety that led him to do so, but the natural habit of the man to note what was near him, even if he was actually thinking of something else. After a little it seemed to him that he heard a sound that might justly be considered suspicious. Instantly he was on the alert, though he made no visible movement. The sound had come from the thick shrubbery that lay to his right, and seemed to have traveled some distance before reaching him.

After a little it was repeated, and this time, as he was listening, he heard it with greater distinctness. It might be made by the lips of a man; but if so, he was either in pain or placed in some such position that he could not articulate with plainness. Was the man in trouble, or what was it that was wrong? Hurrah Harry had the time on his hands and instantly determined to investigate. Silently he raised himself up, and stole into the thicket.

He did not expect to find anything at once, but he was cautious from the start, and so took longer than he thought in traveling perhaps a hundred yards.

Then he became more cautious than ever, and struck his game just about where he expected to find it. There was a little opening in the shrubbery, and about the center of it a man was leisurely reclining, puffing away at a cigarette. He had a villainous face, and if appearances were not very deceptive his countenance no more than did him justice. Tied to a tree near by was another man, and it was from his lips that the sound had come that had attracted Harry's attention. He was gagged by means of a piece of rope that went bridle-wise through his mouth, and he was triced up by the wrists in a way that must have been very painful.

To his astonishment, Harry recognized the bound man as Looney Lum, his guide of the night before.

His first thought was to interfere at once, after



his own decided fashion; but the attitude of the villain on the ground caused him to pause, just before he left his concealment. Some one else was coming, and the sport thought it might be as well to find out more about the game. A second man stepped out of the bushes on the other side of the opening, and he was a fit mate for the first.

"Yer didn't find nuthin', did yer? What yer s'pose any one 'ud be doin', scoutin' round in thar? Ef we're goin' ter do anything with this hyer gerloot, it's time we was at it. Blast him, ef he kin talk he orter be made ter talk."

"He's goin' ter talk right out from ther rattles. We bin hearin' him spoutin' 'bout that thar bonanzy tell we jest is sick ter death ov it, an' now we're goin' ter hear ther hull story, an' see what it's wu'th, er we're goin' ter stop ther blasted nonsense, fur good an' all, ef we stops him with it. You hear us, Looney Lum?"

The man in the tree probably did, since he made a desperate effort to shout, which resulted in just such a groan as that which had called the attention of Hurrah Harry to the spot.

"Now you want ter look hyer, Looney," said the man, savagely, as he stepped up and gave the captive a punch with the stick that he held in his hand. "We're goin' to let yer loose a bit, an' give yer a chance. Ther's sum bottom ter that yarn you hev bin tellin', an' ef yer ever wants ter see sunrise ag'in, we want it all straight ez a string clean down ter bed-rock. An' ef you goes ter try ter shout, you kin jest hev ther hull length ov this knife. We're bad men frum up ther crick, an' you'll find it out, jest too quick ef you try ter skip us."

Then the two men let Looney Lum down, and began to question him about the bonanza that he had boasted of having found; and that they were bad men the listener in the bushes did not at all doubt, because, since he had heard their voices, he recognized them as belonging to the gang of Highbinders who had set upon him the night before. Neither Baby Bunting nor Dad Horner was there, however, and he waited a little longer to see what was to come of this adventure.

#### CHAPTER XIII.

##### HURRAH HARRY IS ALWAYS ON HAND.

"My noble lords, if you have two thousand dollars to place within these hands of mine, and meet me at the house of the Giraffe, then will I the tale unfold—else, silence here, and nothing more. Thy servant hath spoken."

In spite of the rough treatment that Lum had received his spirit was not broken. He simply made the same offer to these men that he had made on several other occasions, and spoke in a tone that showed that he considered the proposition a final one.

"I reckon ther shortest way are ther best with a fool like him," said one of the Highbinders. "It may be thar's nothin' in him, an' we bin throwin' away time layin' fur him, but ef thar should be ary thing, ther best way ez I know ov are ter roast it outen him. Stir up a leetle fire, Johnny, while I git him ready."

Without delay Johnny began to gather up dry branches, of which there was sufficient for his purpose at hand, while the other man savagely cast Lum to the ground, and having regagged him, and bound him to suit his purpose, assisted in getting the fire started. In a few moments it was blazing finely.

Harry watched the procedure with some interest.

He wanted to see how far the ruffians would go before interfering, though he did not intend that Lum should suffer any very severe torture.

The Highbinders were in thorough earnest. When the fire began to throw off heat enough to suit them they bared the feet of the unfortunate man and turned them toward the blaze. A very few moments in that position would render his soles a mass of blisters, if nothing worse came of it.

"Well, I'll swear," said Harry, deliberately leaving his concealment.

He had a revolver in either hand, and he said nothing about a surrender, or a throwing up of hands. The way he felt just then he rather hoped that his appearance would be the signal for an attack. He could not shoot down two men in cold blood but he had a strong yearning to do it in self-defense. And if they had attempted a sudden flight, he would have felt justified in stopping it without a foot-race.

Somewhat to his disgust the men remained motionless. As he stepped out he came directly into the view of one of the villains, who looking up exclaimed:

"Stow it, Johnny, it's ther high boss frum Halcyon."

"So, like Captain Scott's coon, you come down do you? Just draw those feet a little further from the fire and then turn him loose. I'm not telling you to hold up your hands, or any such nonsense. If you think you see your chance at any time, sail in. That's better. How is it, Lum, any bones broken, or serious damage? They had you very foul."

When the ropes were cast off Lum rose to his feet, boots in hand, and darted out of the range of fire before answering in his stilted style:

"Scant harm, oh dominant dictator. But

the caitiffs had me foul. For dungeons am I ready, and even the sword and block, but the time for roasting bath not yet come in my humble opinion. Wherefore, I give my humble thanks to your royalty for thy interference, and beg thee to keep thine eyes open lest they get thee in the same trap. They are of the gang that we charged last night."

"All right, Lum. Eyes are open, and fingers full. It would be a great satisfaction to give them a taste of the same broth, but life is too short to waste on them. Just draw the pistol out of that nearest rascal's belt, and if he attempts to move shoot him dead. I will put Johnny out of the reach of temptation first. Stand up, Johnny, and take hold of that tree as though you loved it, and remember that this is a lonesome spot and I haven't shot a man since yesterday evening. I don't want to hurt you, but if I must, good-by, John."

The experience already had with the stranger sport led these men to believe that they would receive no serious harm at his hands if they submitted; while, as long as he held the drop in his present style, any resistance would only add to their reverse. They had a certain bulldog courage; but they were willing to let well enough alone when they could do no better.

"Now, my lads, you have knocked under like little lambs, and I'm going to treat you the same way. I do not want you to follow and get a crack at Lum from the bushes, so I will leave you tied up here; but I'll let your friends know where to find you, and they can come and set you loose. If you ever try to come back on Lum I'll hunt you out and kill you both. You settle with me if you want to get square. So long."

Leaving the men trussed up without much chance of present escape, Harry led Looney Lum away. At a little distance he halted.

"You had better come to see me this morning. What was all this about? Are you a blamed fool clean through, or is there really something in this bonanza yarn of yours? Tell the truth, man, and if you have got something good I'll pay you what it is worth, and come in on the ground floor."

"Most high born, 'tis a plain story. Once upon a time there came within my hands the map of a great discovery the former holder made. He died, and dying, gave the scroll into my hands, since I had cooled his parched tongue and otherwise ministered to him at the last. It may be the spot can be found again, or it may not. I care not for the bonanza; but two thousand dollars must I have to rehabilitate myself in the eyes of certain ones that I left behind me long ago. I have sworn the scroll shall be seen of no man save he who gives me the thousands needed. It may be worth millions—or not a cent. To-day the chance is thine to find out."

"Honest ante, Lum, do you think it's worth the money?"

"I do, most powerful protector, and this I swear, so help me Heaven, in mine hour of greatest need!"

"That's all right, then. Come around to my room to-morrow morning with the map, and I'll give you a check on Pedro Mercator for the amount. Now, can you strike Hard Pan without getting into the trail near the Shivered Pine? For reasons of my own I don't care to have you seen around there to-night. If you can, light out as fast as you can go."

"As thou wilt, oh despot of all the lands, and to-morrow will I seek thy face. Farewell."

Without any delay Lum trotted off, and Hurrah Harry turned back toward the Shivered Pine.

As he drew nearer he thought that he heard voices, conversing in a low but earnest tone. Again he crept slowly through the concealing branches. His friend might be there, but who was with her was not so certain, and Hurrah Harry was certain that his crop of enemies was far greater than that of his friends. When he was able again to look out on the trail he saw that the woman was there, muffled in her cloak, just as when he parted from her the night before, and that she was waving back a man who was evidently saying something in deep earnest as he tried to get near to her.

The sport guessed at once that the colonel had seen him pass the Golden Stream, and had followed—for what purpose it was not so easy to guess, considering the position held by the man, and his prominence in the town. He had found the girl waiting for him, and had addressed her. Was it with words of insult? Harry bated to act the part of a listener, and yet he wanted to find out about the way he ought to meet the colonel. If he did not have a pretty clear case it might not be altogether healthy for him to handle the manager of the Golden Stream as he had the skulking Highbinders. The case was different.

Colonel Canter had forgotten that he was in pursuit of the stranger sport, in the interest that he took in this woman whom he had unexpectedly met, and who had risen on him with a warning as he came skulking down the trail, revolver in hand. He halted as she bade him, but he stared at her with an astonished gaze as she made certain signs, and then attempted to draw nearer.

"No closer, if it please thee," said the girl, in a tone of calm command. "When I saw thee slinking down the hill, a revolver in thy hand, I knew that thou wert bent on some mischief which it suits me not to have done while I am near. Go back, I command thee, in the name of one who hath the right to command."

"And who are you, my fair damsel? There is some mystery here that I must unravel. I heard of you, and the lively racket you caused last night, but I don't understand your signs, or your right to use them. Perhaps you have mistaken me for the stranger that so strangely appeared to your rescue. From what we heard of him he is likely to be of some such secret band as signs like those always indicate. I must know more of this."

"Hadst thou obeyed thy orders, and been in waiting where thou wert looked for, thou wouldst have known a deal more than thou hast asked. Now, thou wilt blindly obey, or feel the consequences! Stand back! Thou art making the mistake of thy life."

"Mistake or not I must and will see your face, if only to know if it is as beautiful as those who saw it at Hoodlum Hall have reported."

The colonel had put away his revolver and now advanced warily. He had heard of how it fared with Don Silvio, and he did not intend to taste her knife. Yet he fully intended to see the face that was so nearly veiled by the muffling cloak.

With a suddenness that was discomposing the cloak dropped away from the faultless shoulders, and the girl stood revealed before him, though dressed with more splendor than when she made her appearance at the Hall.

"Thou hast seen me, look well, so that at the next meeting there be no mistake. I vouch for it that thou wilt not fail to obey then—if the Golden Stream has not before that received a new manager."

He gazed into her face earnestly, but gave no sign of recognition, and seemed to be more puzzled than charmed.

"You are either a witch or a traitor!" he suddenly exclaimed, and with an unexpected spring he caught her two wrists in a grip that was neither tender nor light. "Confess the truth. You are a decoy, sent out to aid in the capture of Captain Cowl, and this stranger is working with you. A precious pair, to think that they can bring me into his ruin. You have an eye to the Golden Stream, no doubt, but I will tear the masks away from you two, and show you as you are—unless—"

He looked into the beautiful face that was held so unshrinkingly to meet his gaze, and paused to consider. Was this a chance meeting—and if so was there not something better than threats to be said? The girl was unyielding, and yet strangely passive in his grasp. What did it mean?

He shifted her wrists so that they both lay in one hand, while his freed arm attempted to drop around her waist. He had forgotten that he had followed Hurrah Harry down the hill. Her beauty drew on him, and there was something in her eyes that seemed to bewilder his brain.

But just before his arm could encircle her waist he felt her two hands leave his with a wrench, she caught him by the shoulders and flung him backward with a power he never would have looked for in a woman; and to his disgust he felt himself caught in a pair of masculine arms, while the voice of Hurrah Harry sounded in his ear:

"Now, really, colonel, we can't allow you to insult a lady. I am afraid it will be actually necessary to stand you on your head."

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### PONCHO PONCHO SPEAKS SOBER SENSE.

The threat was followed so closely by its accomplishment that before he could notice how the process was completed the colonel was looking upward, his eyes near the ground and his heels high in the air, while Hurrah Harry held him in the inverted position by a firm grasp on his ankles.

"Now, Miss Poncho Poncho, I was a witness of the greater part of the interview, not intentionally, I assure you, and, so far as I saw, the gentleman's greatest aim was to gain a view of your face. I can't say that I blame him much, for it is one worth the looking at. I judge that he has been rebuked enough for by-gones, and he might as well run on home. But if you think he is a bigger wretch than he looks, say the word and I'll take him over my knee and tuck it on till you say that it is time to stop."

"Let him depart. If he has not learned his lesson yet, it may be taught to him by a sterner teacher before he dreams of it."

"Depart goes. Repair to the Golden Stream, Mister Man, and swear at thy leisure."

Dexterity and strength went together in the next move of the sport. He gave a step to gather force, and at the same time made a swing that actually tossed the colonel on his feet again, though he felt the shock from toe to eyebrow, and staggered back half a dozen paces before he could recover his balance, or attempt to draw a weapon. When his hand had mechanically



sought his belt, he found that it was not in its place, and looking around he perceived it at the feet of the High Horse from Halcyon.

"It's a fact that I'm mighty careless, but as I have no particular yearning to wipe you out at this stage of the game, I thought it was as well to put temptation out of the way until you had a chance to think a little. I'm a liberal man, however, willing to give you all you want in the way of satisfaction. If you must have it I will guarantee that there will be no grumbling at me or any one else when the circus is over."

With a dexterous twist of his foot he tossed belt, weapons and all over so that they fell at the feet of the colonel. Then he folded his arms, and looked at the manager of the Golden Stream in an inquiring way that was not particularly soothing.

In Hard Pan the colonel had a reputation, and would not have dared to submit; but out here he had his life to take care of, and other things need not trouble him. He slowly gathered up the belt.

"I think you have made a mistake in your man. I am no brawler, and for the present prefer to allow you to run your course, as it is not hard to guess where that will end. At the same time, if you ever approach me to carry out your threats, I will shoot you down like a wolf. You and your partner can finish your interview at your leisure, but so long as you are heard of in the neighborhood of Hard Pan, there will be eyes on you both, and at the first trip—up you go."

Then the colonel stalked back over the route by which he had come, and it was pretty certain that he did not intend further to interrupt their conference.

The sport watched him calmly until he was fairly out of pistol-range before he turned to his companion.

When his eyes met hers, the daughter of the stars was regarding him earnestly, and the look was returned with interest by Harry, who had not yet really had a fair view of her face. The glowing freshness of her perfect beauty was something more than a surprise.

"Sorry, miss, if your gratitude has led you into the line of insult," said Harry, with a self-possessed bow to this beautiful vision. "Perhaps it would have been safer for you to have called your meeting in Hard Pan, but of course I did not stop to consider. When you called I came, and very glad I am that I did. Yet I did not think that the gentleman late of the United States Army would have attempted to molest an unprotected female. Now that we have met, it would be best to hurry our interview, for it is not long until dark, and unless you expect to enter the town under my guidance I do not wish to detain you here. Of one thing I might assure you. I am in no great haste to begin my hunt. Of course I never throw up on what I undertake, but there are other things that are more important to my pocket, and there is plenty of time for Captain Cowl and his capture in the long three weeks ahead of us."

"And you still hold to the story that you told me last night, that you did not come here with any designs on the chief of road-agents?"

"My child, do I really look like a thief-taker? If I do, I want a new suit of clothes forthwith. I considered that I was a thoroughbred sport, and that even a lady, who is not supposed to know so much about such things, would make no mistakes. I do not think I would rob a church because some one offered me a bet—one must draw a line somewhere—but anything at all legitimate generally brings me out. Why, I sawed a cord of wood once to win a dollar—and haven't been quite that big a fool since. I was young then."

"You do not seem very aged now," responded the girl with a charming smile. "No man who had been hardened by a life of any length, such as you would have me believe that you have led, would take such risks for such little reason. What is a girl more or less to thee?"

"Nothing but a woman, and that's a fact. Only, with me a woman means a heap, if I do say it myself."

"And does one woman mean more than another to you? How if she be both old and haggard? There is not a more dangerous man in his hate than Silvio Mercedo, and in Hard Pan there is no other man with such power to crush as that same Chester Canter whom thou hast just handled as though he were an infant. They will both be at thee henceforth, and if Captain Cowl joins in the hunt what chance canst thou, a stranger and alone, expect to have? If thou art wise thou wilt leave this town at once. 'Tis a place where it can hardly delight thee to stay, and to which I would not have come had not the stars drawn me hither. Consider well if it be not best for thee to leave here, and at once. The stars show to me that anything that it seems to thee will be lost shall be made up to thee four-fold. And little profit can it be to thee to remain. After the game of last night at the Ivy-Green, few if any men will care to play with thee until they know for a surety that thy streak hath run out, and to-day, when they heard certain news from Halcyon, every man runs a lay-out game decided to bar thee

out. No one says thy game is unfair—only that thy luck runs too great."

Harry listened with a pleased smile to her voice that rippled on like running water. In his way of talking it would take him an hour to answer to all the matter she had laid out for him, and yet he did not care to stop her. It was more than pleasant to hear her low voice whispering—almost—in his ear. When she had finished he scarcely knew where to begin.

"I generally tell the truth when a woman asks me a question, and so I'll not say that it would not make a difference as to the looks of the lady. I am only a mortal man, you understand, and don't profess to be guided by the stars. But I do not know that there is any woman living that has more claim on me than another, if that is what you mean; and no one that I would any sooner back against two such rascals as Silvio and the colonel than yourself. If either of the gentlemen think they can crush yours truly, I would like to invest all the cash I can spare from business operations on it, and give them a reasonable time and clear of the law to do it in. And you will have to show me better reasons for leaving the camp than the fact that they are going to bar me out of their tin-pot games. I have just bought into a mine, and am going to set up for a bonanza king. Why, in two weeks the Golden Stream will be nowhere, and Chester Canter will have to hide his diminished head and howl. Imagine me a bonanza king, and one of the magnates of the camp. Oh, when I do spread myself, I reach all over the land!"

"I am afraid you can never get rich from any mine to be bought here for such price as thou couldst pay. The Golden Stream, speak of it as thou wilt, is the only thing that is yielding a fortune here, and thy money could not buy that. What price didst thou pay?"

"A beggerly little two thousand—and wealth untold to come from it."

"Thou art laughing at me!" exclaimed the girl hotly. In his voice she had detected something that told her his hopes were less than his words. "Where is this mine for which so great things can be promised? The price is too good for the claims that are for sale, and not enough for a property that would fill the desires of a man like thee."

"If some one could tell you, you would know more than I do. I haven't seen it yet, but the fellow is to call around with the map to-morrow, and we are going to try and figure it out, where it is to be found. If it should happen to lay over the Golden Stream, it would be a weary joke on somebody."

"Art thou really and truly in earnest in this? Wouldst thou throw away thy good money in such ventures as these?"

"You don't understand. Come light, go light; and if it won't double itself, what's the use of having it? In the first place, I'm not sure that I am investing my money in the thing at all. After what you say about the players getting up a combine against me, there don't seem any other chance to invest around here; and I have a grub stake to put where it will do the most good. The party will be calling in three weeks for his first dividend, and as I never met a squarer man in all my travels, I ought to have something decent to pay him or show him on account."

"A partner, do'st thou say? And who may he be? Is he to join with thee in the hunt for Captain Cowl?"

"Blest if I know his name, and I didn't ask it; but he don't look like that sort of a man either. No, I do not think that I could jump the camp. If he came and found me missing, he might think my nerve and his judgment were both off color."

"But for thy life?"

"Don't! You make me weak. There can be no chances worse than those that I have risked in my past life; and if I didn't recognize that there was a cherubim of destiny sitting on my bedpost, that will watch over me till the time for the end comes, I would be madder than ever the camp figured out Looney Lum to be. And that end—you can't dodge it. What is the use of being a daughter of the stars if you don't know that?"

"What, indeed? Thy case is hopeless, and I will urge thee no more. And yet, if thou wouldst capture Captain Cowl, my advice after some sort must be taken, since he can be found three days from now at Bed Rock, which is beyond the mountain. When he has left there, who can tell where next he can be seen?"

"That is reliable?"

"I know it to be the truth, and could tell what takes him there if it were needed. It is thy best chance, since he has no friends there, and the people of Bed Rock would help thee."

"Thanks. I believe that you are in earnest, and that your information can be relied on; but I cannot leave the camp until I have taken possession of this mine I spoke of. I don't think you will misunderstand me. I can trust to luck to put him in reach again; but I can trail him down at another time better than I can spare a day now. And yet, I thank you all the same for the information, even if I cannot make use of it just now. Perhaps we can meet again, when you are not so much a daughter of the

stars, and I not so much of a sport; and then the capture of road-agents, and the opening of bonanzas, will not seem so nearly the only things there are in the world. For to-night, if I cannot serve thee further as a protector, farewell."

Mutually the two held out, each a right hand, and their palms clasped with a warm, lingering pressure. Then they turned away, Hurrah Harry striding back in the direction of the Golden Stream, and the town that lay beyond.

"If the daughter of the stars is not interested in yours truly, then I have more cheek than brains," was the mental conclusion of the sport, as he strolled on in the gloaming. "Pity, too, for I don't remember to have seen a handsomer woman, and it's always sad when a beauty misplaces her affections. It is apt to break them all up. Yet she seems to be honestly in earnest to help me capture this gentleman of the Cows. Wonder what she has in for him. Perhaps, as Virgil hath it, something about an injury to her slighted form. Maybe some day she will be looking up what the stars have got to say against Hurrah Harry. It's a failing of the sex to fly off the handle when they think they are not properly appreciated. She has a story, I'll be bound, and if I ask no questions, maybe I'll know the truth of it some day. For I haven't seen the last of her, and I'll bet on it—Lum's bonanza to a half-interest in the Golden Stream. Wonder, by the way, if the manager will take a sitting shot at me as I go by. I must take my chances."

The manager did not appear, however, and in due season the High Horse from Halcyon reached the Giraffe in safety, and that evening found opportunity to inform Baby Bunting where two of the Highbinders were doing something more than say their prayers.

"And don't forget to let them know," Harry added, "that if I catch either of them within a mile of that place again, that I'll skin him alive."

## CHAPTER XV.

### COLONEL CANTER MAKES AN INVENTORY.

DON SILVIO MERCEDO, having been carried away by his friends and put to bed, found himself anchored securely for a few days thereafter.

On the day following the interview at the Shivered Pine, between Harry and the singular woman who called herself the daughter of the stars, the Don had a visitor in the shape of Colonel Canter.

In public these two men had little to say to each other. They were in entirely different walks of life, a difference that would have occasioned some comment, and that of an unfavorable nature so far as the colonel was concerned, if they had been seen together. But in private they certainly had some interests in common, from the confidential way in which they began their conversation.

At the outset Silvio was in no good humor. He looked up at the colonel with a scowl, and felt hastily under his pillow for a weapon. They were alone together, and the Don appeared to distrust his visitor.

"Hast thou come to finish thy bloody work?" was his query, as his hand balanced a revolver, trembling a little, but able to do execution at that short range.

"What nonsense is this?" queried the colonel, shortly.

"All Hard Pan is busy with the fight with the strange sport, and how he bested you with a knife without ever being fairly hurried. He is the chief of the camp now, and we old-timers must take back seats. When I found time—knowing that meanwhile you were well cared for—I came to see how badly you were really hurt. How long will it be before you will be out?"

"Longer than the fools thought who saw me handled. That man is a devil. I knew not myself how hard he hit, and how deeply he struck, until the next day. And thou swearst that he was not set on me by thee or the gang?"

"What flea is biting you now? What have we to do with him? Did he not win my own good money, to the last dollar that I had in my purse? If he has not killed me it was because I held my peace when I saw that he had the drop. And we have heard of him by a man who has come from Halcyon. A wonderful sport he is, who takes all chances, wins when he bets, and if crowded to the wall he always kills."

"Yet he and that woman are in league together, and she is either a spy, or belongs to Captain Cowl."

"If she is a spy, as I believe myself, she may well be dangerous. But if she belonged to Captain Cowl what had you to fear, and why did you try to wipe her out until you were certain about it?"

"She made no sign; then, after what she told me I was not so anxious to know. In either case she was dangerous to me."

"How is that? You must have some underhanded work on hand that you scarce dared have known. You may as well tell me the



truth, and I can promise that I will stand between you and harm. Out with it."

"And thou dost swear that it was not for that these two were set on to slay me?"

"Man alive! Have they not been at me? Speak out, and whatever it was I promise to stand between thee and harm!"

"A couple of us had laid out a little game to be played with Pedro Mercator, which would put gold in our pockets, and leave no one else the wiser. That is over now, but how the deuce it was known I would give a hundred pesos to discover!"

Canter knit his brows at this confession, though he had expected something of the kind.

"A dangerous game was that same, and I could swear that it would have failed in any event. What led you to plot against Mercator? Had you harmed him it would surely have cost you your life."

"When it was found out who to strike. That was the secret that must have been told her by the stars, even as she said."

"No stars; but the thing smacks loudly of some detective work that may lead to the death of more than one. I tell you, they know everything. Why they do not strike is a mystery, unless it is to safely have bigger game in the toils. Yet, if that be so, why give warning? There is little of time to consider, since the blow must fall on them before they can do their bloody work. I was in hopes that you might be able to give some help; but you have enough to do in taking care of yourself."

"Is he so much more than mortal man that a bullet cannot reach him, a club crush his head? Set on him the boys on the first dark night. Other men have been found crushed, why not he?"

"Bless your soul, the boys have had one meeting with him and decline another—those that are left. Smoke couldn't if he would, and the rest wouldn't if they could. Baby Bunting and Dad Horner have gone in with him, though they swear that they do not intend to go back on the boys, and went out too near the Shivered Pine and let two of them loose that he had caught interfering with that crazy Lum, who hangs around the Giraffe. They swear that he is bad medicine, won't have anything to do with him, and hint that this woman is some one that can protect him with the captain. He has them completely under cow, and if we want safety and vengeance we must work for them ourselves."

"And thou dost not like to strike a man thyself in the dark?"

The Don asked the question with a sneer and waited for his answer, though he knew well enough what it would be.

"I have not done it yet, though there is no telling what I may do if forced to it. Unless we can get Rafelle at him in a square duel, it looks as though some one would have such a job on their hands."

"And why not Captain Cowl, since it is his life that is threatened most of all. Did he know of this vaunt of the stranger certain it is that he would take a hand in. It would not be hard to send him out of the world. A bullet, or the thrust of a knife, or if he could be caught beyond the town a rope would do the work quickly and well."

"If he once goes a step too far within the town the rope may be already twisted that is to take his life. But he is so careful that it will be hard to get so clear a case against him that the people will rise on him *en masse*. Until he is crowded into a corner he knows who it is safe to kill, and acts accordingly. If one was only certain that he was a law officer, or that he was not, the case would be plainer. If Cowl can be reached, which it is not always easy to do, he shall be notified. He will do his work without any such cautions as we must take. There is one other desperate chance that I have thought of, provided it is known that he is not a detective masquerader. If we can get him enmeshed with the law the rest is easy; but the plan I have thought of is one that cuts both ways—or may. I will see to it, however, and perhaps explain when I see you again."

The colonel had accomplished all that he could in this visit, and took his leave. An idea had suggested itself as available under certain contingencies, and he wished to find out at once if it could be carried into execution. From Silvio he went straight to Pedro Mercator.

He found the banker in his office, and alone. The men knew each other well enough, and did not waste time in formal greetings. Pedro nodded toward a seat, into which the colonel dropped.

"What is it now?" asked Mercator, somewhat roughly, as the colonel turned on him a glance that had something of inquiry in it.

"Business, Pedro, business. Another little favor that I may want at your hands though I have not laid out the full details as yet. I have been lenient in my requirements of late and if I don't become more exacting soon I am afraid that you will actually forget that you are my debtor, I suppose, however, that you do not deny the fact as yet?"

"Mayhap yes, and mayhap no. If there be no one by I am willing to let it go as you say.

Press me not too hard in the presence of others and I am fairly willing as a beast of burden, but it is dangerous to admit such things in the presence of witnesses, and I doubt if thou couldst force me to do it."

"Bless my soul if Pedro is not going to kick along with the rest! What is the world coming to? And if Pedro spends the greater part of the remainder of his natural life behind the bars of a certain Eastern Penitentiary—how then? The witnesses won't pay much attention to what you confess; they will be interested in the sentence of the court chiefly. Pedro, I have you foul, but I have always been lenient; what is the use to be a kicker?"

"Because, if I wait there may come a day when I will want to kick and can't. It is best to begin in time. Still, if it is some simple matter of accommodation that thou must have, say thy say. I am not churl enough to refuse thee a favor, since thou hast been kinder than I deserve. Speak out, and say what it is that brings thee here. Some one may come to interrupt."

"Ah, I thought that you would come back to your mutt, before entirely flying in the face of Providence—in the shape of Chester Canter, I will make you an offer with this thing, to make you all the more willing. If the work is well done when I ask it I pledge you that you shall be satisfied that it will never be in my power to order you to do thus and so again."

"And what is it that you want now?"

"I understand that this stranger who calls himself Hurrah Harry has introduced himself, and made a special deposit with you on the night of his arrival, at rather a late hour. Is that a fact?"

"A fact, but how hast thou heard it? I speak not of such matters of business to every man."

"Oh, it is no secret, since he boasted of it himself, at Mike's the same evening. He was anxious enough to let Hard Pan know that he had dealings with Pedro Mercator. A wise plan it was, since it placed the money that he had won and his own beyond the reach of those he had been fleecing. A dangerous man he is, Pedro, and one that will bear watching. Did you pay any special attention to the money that he left in your hands?"

"What hast thou in thy hair now? No special attention if I remember rightly. I was pressed for time just then, and if I mistake not the amount remains together even yet, as it was when he gave it into my hands."

"Good. Then perhaps we can catch the rat. If you can swear to it, it may be as well for you to look it over. There is a report that he is a dealer in what are called 'green-goods,' and that he was arrested in one town at least for having them in his possession. If we need you as a witness can we have your oath in the matter?"

"What rascality art thou hatching now? That investigation might not be altogether pleasing, since, if I mistake not, a good share of his deposit might be traced home to you."

"That makes little difference in the matter. The manager of the Golden Stream is too well known at Hard Pan for any one to believe that he has anything to do with counterfeit money. Your oath that he put so many hundred dollars of the stuff in your hands for safe-keeping, would be sufficient to send him away under suspicion of being a fit subject for trial. Hard Pan would be relieved of his presence, and I can promise that you will never be sent for to give your evidence on his trial. This is what I intend to ask of you, and the more hearty aid you give, if called on, the better it will be for you. You will observe that I am asking nothing more than for simple justice as it appears on the face of the thing, and if you refuse it will be doubly at your peril. Will you examine that deposit and let me know how it stands?"

"A customer of mine is generally safe with me as long as he protects my interests," murmured Pedro in a musing manner, "and there might be money in this for me if I approached the sport in the proper way. Yet it might not be safe for me to attempt to protect him if the hand of justice is reaching after him. But I must be sure that I am to be protected. He is truly a desperate man, and I would not do anything against him unless I was certain that there would be no failure. If he came back for vengeance I would stand a slim chance against him and his revolver."

"You hypocritical old villain, if that is what you are afraid of, I can give you all the assurance wanted, that he will never come back from trial, if, indeed he ever leaves the town. He is more than likely to resist arrest, and in that case the charge is so serious that the marshals who will have the case in hand will be justified in taking him dead, if it cannot be done alive. And if he should slay a couple of deputies in the course of his resistance, I am afraid the law-abiding Hard Panners would give him such a taste of rope as would save all further trouble."

"In such a case as that I think I dare promise that I will aid thee so far as to look through the package as left with me, let thee know what there is found; and, if it then suit thy wishes, swear to what I find—but I swear

to nothing else, and thou must attend to the bringing of the charge. Here, in Hard Pan, I am only known as a proud banker, exclusive in his tastes, but elsewhere I have had dealings with such gentry, and care not to have my reputation for liberality suffer."

"That is all I ask. Look up the matter at once."

"Be not impatient. The notes and coin are not here, but I will lose no time and let thee know."

The promise was all that Canter could ask, and having gained that he took his departure.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### HARRY BUYS THE MAP.

COLONEL CANTER had felt certain that he was alone with the banker. In fact, the nature of his address was such that if there had been any one in hearing he thought it absolutely certain that the banker would have betrayed it. When he passed out, however, a man who had been a listener took the seat just vacated by the colonel—and that man was Hurrah Harry himself.

"A sweet little scheme," he said, as he settled down into the chair. "He calculates on trumping up the accusation to get me where I can't or daren't defend myself, and then kill me at his leisure, either here or on the way to the district court. He's a bad sort of a master, Pedro, and the sooner you cut loose from him the better."

"True, but there has been great gain in the connection, and I might even stand it a little longer if I did not feel that he comes near to the end of his rope. Thou mayest not believe me, but for the secret he has I do not fear him, though I have so pretended. It is that I have had any dealings with him and his that makes me somewhat his servant. Yet I have had my plans laid from the first for the hour of separation, and I fear him less than he thinks. In this matter of thine what am I to do? Thou canst understand something of my position, and that I dare not openly expose him lest strange questions be asked, but I have said that I was thy friend, and such thou wilt find me."

"A rascally dog he is to have for a master, but I guess you are able for him; and if not, perhaps, before I am done with him, I may rid you of him altogether."

"I shall not weep. But shall I do as he says in this matter?"

"Why not? Only see that it is delayed a little till I get my feet fairly in the stirrups. After that, if he can unseat me it is all right, and he is a better man than I am. It is just all going to be fun amazing, and you can sit on the outside and laugh. It was lucky that I strolled in here this morning, because I have got hold of an idea or two that may pay me big. And now, Mercator, I must have a little money. I am one of your solid business men after this, and going to make a sensation in Hard Pan, don't you forget it. Two thousand I want; and perhaps a little help in finding out how the land lays around my mining possessions, when I get fairly on to their metes and bounds. I understand that you have the run of the mining operations here, and that will save me showing my hand if I want to ask questions."

The banker was profuse in his offers of service, and Harry had reason to believe that they meant more in this case than his words always implied. He drew the money at the counter—for Lum declined to have a check if he could get the cash—and went back to the Giraffe to complete his arrangements for becoming a millionaire.

"Now, then, Lum," he said, a little later, as he looked his partner in the face, "don't be a bit bigger fool than you can help. You have got hold of a man that will treat you white, and you want to gather your wits together and make the most of the chance, for you can bet high if this goes by you will never get such another one. There's your two thousand, now trot out your map, and any further particulars on the subject."

Looney Lum could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses as the money dropped down on the table before him. He gathered it up with a pleased laugh, counted it, looked it over once and again, and actually kissed it. Then he turned to Harry.

"Most high born seignor, the map is such as I told thee of, and is at thy service; but for other particulars you ask in vain. I have searched for such a spot from Beersheba to the coast of Dan, and have not recognized the shadow of a landmark. May thy luck be greater."

He threw down a little buckskin bag that up to this time he had kept hidden in his breast, and then stuffed away his money in a manner that showed he was not sure that an effort would not be made to take it away from him again.

There was no such idea in the mind of the sport, with whom a trade was always a trade, and to whom the two thousand did not seem to be badly spent if it only purchased experience. He leisurely opened the bag and took therefrom another folded bit of buckskin, a little square, of fine texture, and that had been carefully prepared. It was the map that Looney Lum had so long managed to hold as a secret, though



more than one effort had been made to get a sight of it, or to wrest it from his keeping.

"Haven't been carrying this much, have you, sport? Was afraid that you had worn it out of all recognition. It's a very good map, and remarkably well preserved. I wouldn't give such a figure for it to frame, but take it all 'round and I am very well satisfied with my bargain. You can retire now while I figure this thing out. I won't need you again until it is time to begin explorations, or elect a president for the company."

With Hurrah Harry the most important question was not whether this was really a map to a gold mine, but whether it was the map of any land that lay around in reaching distance. He looked it over thoughtfully, and at first without recognizing the landmarks.

After a little the thought struck him that it was not intended to be mastered at first sight, and that there was something of a cipher about it. He turned it and twisted it, and before long began to see a little daylight. The top of the drawing was not north, and the course of the river had been reversed. There was a map within a map, seemingly all the same thing, and yet part showed the general lay of the country at large while the little segment whose lines fitted in so nicely, that no break was to be seen in reality was on a very much larger scale than the rest and exhibited a contracted locality.

"It looks natural, sure enough," reflected Harry. "If you stand the mountain on its head, and make the river run backward, with several other unimportant variations, I don't see anything to interfere with its being right around here, as Lum thinks it is. I must take a view of the land from the mountain top, and see how it all lays. I was so busy planning out the campaign as I came down that I didn't do more than get my bearings. I'll take a look around there this afternoon and see how the prospect has brightened now I am catching on once more. Lum can keep, though he will be wild for something to build on."

The fact of his not having put in an appearance the evening before at the Ivy-Green, or any of the other places around town had excited some surprise. The dealers believed that it was on account of the resolution they had taken to bar him out at their tables, and the short card players for once were not altogether to miss a sport with whom they believed there would be no trouble to get up a game. A delegation who visited the Giraffe to see if there were any important intelligence to be gained found that he had spent some time talking with Jem, and then gone to bed at an early hour. They went back and reported that the sport had lost his sand, and was afraid to venture out after dark.

That just suited Harry, and to tell the truth he expected something of the kind. He had hit them a little too hard at the outset, and if he wanted things real lively they would have to get a breathing spell. By daylight he knew he could ruffle around without much danger of attack; and he hardly expected that any one would follow him in his stroll across the river, though he kept thoroughly on his guard, all the same. After what he had heard Colonel Canter say, he had no doubt that he would be assassinated if certain persons thought they had the opportunity.

He loitered along over the bridge, and took a look at the spot where he had signalized his entrance upon Hard Pan society by the rescue of Jason Bartram's daughter. He looked down into the gorge, and shrugged his shoulders. Surely no man in his senses would take such a leap, and the wonder to him was that he ever was able, incumbered as he had been by the body of the senseless Blanche, to climb out. Then he went on up the mountain-side until he could obtain a good view of the valley.

For perhaps half an hour he remained, scanning the landscape, and from time to time consulting his map.

"Just as I thought," he said, as he rose to go. "It's out the other side of the Golden Stream."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### HARD TO HURT.

HARRY came quietly down the mountain-side, and having plenty of time at his disposal diverged somewhat from the trail as he neared the river. He had not forgotten the ruffians that had attempted the abduction of Blanche Bartram, and he wanted to see if they had left any traces about their hiding-place—and it was just possible that they might be lurking there again.

There was no sign of the ruffians having returned to the spot since their defeat, but he found where Blanche had struggled loose, and where he had dropped the man at whom he had fired. Then he looked over at the bridge—and Blanche stood there once more.

"That young lady must calculate on living around here, or else is anxious to see how it goes being carried off. She has hardly come out here to interview me. Ah, do I see the cat in the meal tub? Once more I seem fated to interrupt the gallant colonel at a trysting place—or has he an idea that he is once more on my trail? It really ought not to be any of my business, after

the solid warning that she got here the other night, but if the veteran's steps are not very close to a chalk-line I will have to chip according to the regulation style. If he sees me coming he will be apt to draw, and that will make things more sultry than ever."

The sport was in fair pistol-shot of the bridge when the colonel made his appearance, and might have been seen if Canter's attention had not been confined to the trail, and the girl that loitered in the middle of it.

He came upon her before she was aware of his approach, and addressed her harshly, though in a tone too low to reach the ears of the sport.

There was nothing that Harry despised more than to be compelled to act as a spy on a lady. He could not well retreat, and was liable to be seen any moment if he remained where he was. Nor did he care to do anything that would be obviously intended to call attention to his presence. So he simply turned toward the trail, and resumed his way to town as though he was unaware of the presence of the two, who were just now in an animated discussion.

The two were no strangers, though, as Fanny had hinted, he was by no means a favorite with Miss Bartram. And the address of the colonel showed that he considered that he had a certain proprietary right in the young lady, and at present was in no good humor with her and her actions.

"What are you doing here, Blanche Bartram?" he asked, as he suddenly appeared at her side. "Had you not warning enough the other night, or is it that you have an appointment with the ruffian who went through the farce of your rescue? I suspected that something of that kind was to follow when I saw your servant in such shamelessly earnest conversation with him on the public street. Go home! This is no place for you at this hour in the day."

"You are overstepping the bounds of your authority, Colonel Canter," was her reply.

"On compulsion I believe that I bargained not to treat you with positive rudeness in my father's house, but I do not know that such a promise to my father authorizes you to speak to me elsewhere. I am not accountable to you for my movements, and such an address from you is no less than an insult. I prefer to be alone."

"No doubt," sneered the colonel, "since it is pretty certain that this man without even a name that can be mentioned in respectable society, will not seek your company in my presence. Yes, Miss Bartram, I have a right to offer my counsel in a case like this. As my promised wife, I would be less than a fool if I did not object to your seeking to meet this vagabond in the outskirts of the city, after he has been forbidden the house by your father."

"It is false that I am your promised wife, or that I ever seriously contemplated the possibility of such a fate."

"Your father did, then; which is rather more to the purpose so long as you know so little of your own mind, or the things that are for your own good interest. If you doubt my word, ask him. He will tell you that it has all been arranged, and at the proper time will be explained to you. Take my word for it and retire. I will replace you at the trysting-place, and if it is necessary, explain your unavoidable absence. Go, I say! Do not make the folly of a girl appear to be something worse."

"And I tell you that neither choice nor parental authority can ever make you anything but hateful in my eyes. I do not believe that Jason Bartram would seriously contemplate such a wrong, great as I admit is your influence with him; but if he has done so, it will never be accomplished. Having said that much, any supposed right of yours to control my actions vanishes, and I demand that you leave me."

The young lady was growing angry in earnest, and laid down her points like a lawyer, and then fled like a woman.

At least, she attempted to flee, and would have rushed straight on over the bridge and away from the town had it not been for his detaining hand, that reached out and caught her dress in his fingers.

She gave an angry wrench, that tore the piece out from the goods, and thus gaining her freedom, stumbled forward, directly into the arms of Hurrah Harry, who now had no particular objections to making his appearance on the scene.

"Hurrah, boys, what's the trouble now?" exclaimed Harry, releasing Blanche from his involuntary clasp, and setting her behind him as he faced the colonel.

"Strikes me that it is so long since this gentleman lost his place that he has forgotten he ever was one. He seems to be always where he is not wanted; I wonder if he is ever where he is needed. Oh, no, if you please not. I have been there before myself, and understand the dodge to a charm. Not this evening, if the court knows herself, Mr. Buckley."

The colonel, having noticed that the sport had not been suddenly fatal to any one since his arrival at Hard Pan, had determined to try his luck with the chief here, where the only witnesses were men of his own choosing, whom he had already summoned by a motion of his hand.

Even while Harry was speaking, he sprang forward in a savage attack, shouting as he came:

"Hands off of that lady, you ruffian! You have reached the limit when you insult a lady!"

He struck as he came, and the colonel knew how to strike—quick, straight and hard.

Yet if Harry had thought only of the blow, and answered the attack in kind, the result might have been all that the colonel desired, since the latter was ready for him, and the blow, heavy though it was, in reality was intended for a feint. In his other hand Canter concealed a derringer, and when the High Horse sent in his return he intended to shoot.

But Harry neither guarded nor countered. With a swift twist he turned himself sideways, dodged the stroke, and as Canter overreached himself, caught his other hand, and with a dexterous wrench, flung it up over his head. The derringer went flying end over end, and the colonel gave a low moan of pain in spite of himself, since the arm seemed to be torn almost from its socket.

"I ought to give you one for good luck, but I hate to strike a man when he's down, or can't guard. If you want it very bad, I'll hold one hand behind my back, and we'll both hit together; but if you'll take the advice of a man that has some experience in these things, you will go home and put your head to soak without it. It's too big as it is."

"You bound! I'll be even with you yet!" foamed the colonel, yet shrinking back under the steady gaze of the sport.

"Even goes, as long as it's above board, and you do not call in too many of the neighbors. But the presence of a lady ought to restrain those angry passions a little. At least allow her to retire before you air yourself further."

Miss Blanche had shrunk back, somewhat terrified, when the two men came together. Now she stepped forward firmly, and just in time to cover the sport. The men summoned by the colonel were at hand, and if he got in his story first they might begin to shoot.

"There is no use for further words. This gentleman has for the second time rendered me a service for which my thanks are due. Beyond those two times we have never met, nor had we any expectation of meeting on either occasion. We are practically strangers, to my regret I may add, and if he will give me his escort I will leave you here to digest at your leisure the very well merited rebuke that you have received. Pray allow us to pass, and Colonel Canter, I will hold you responsible before all Hard Pan for our safety from any treacherous attack."

She held the floor, and when she was done speaking took the arm of the sport and marched him off, leaving the colonel with a very bad case of mental dyspepsia on his hands.

"He would have taken your life without hesitation; my father must know of this outrage," she said, as they dropped out of earshot.

"If he could. Least said is soonest mended. Better let the gentleman's sins find him out. I am not done with him by a long shot, and it is just as well to be finding out what he is made of before the real fun begins, and the time for experiments is short."

"I hope that you do not intend to carry this thing further."

"Carry? Not a bit of it. I never carry anything as long as I can find the other man willing to do the work. And he seems monstrous willing."

Before long they came to the spot where they were to separate, and Harry bade her good-night.

As she hurried away she looked back over her shoulder and murmured: "If I had only met him first."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

BLANCHE REFUSES TO BE SACRIFICED—"DO YOUR WORST!"

UPON second thoughts Blanche decided to take Harry's advice, and say nothing to her father in regard to the encounter at the bridge. It would give the colonel a chance to develop his side of the story first, but in one way that suited her best. She would have a better idea how far she could count on her father, and learn the worst at the earliest possible moment.

Great was the surprise, then, of Jason Bartram, the following morning, when the colonel, with his arm in a sling, almost rushed into his presence.

Canter had been nursing his wrath so carefully that it was still at a white heat, and he left his Sunday manners at home—much to Bartram's regret.

"See here!" he roughly began.

"The time for plain speaking has got here, and I find I have to give it to you with the bark on. Do you, or do you not, intend to keep faith with me? This thing of shilly-shally has been going on long enough. I have nothing further to wait for, and I will wait no longer. You bring that girl to her bearings, or I'll begin to talk mighty loud. How is it to be?"

"Really, Canter, you quite overpower me. What has gone wrong now? Everything has been managed as you desired. It was your own



wish that I should say nothing definite to Blanche until you gave me the word, and I thought that only a few days ago you expressed your satisfaction at the way things were moving."

"Perhaps I was a fool, unable to see how things were running; but I believe, upon my soul, that it is this accursed stranger who has bewitched her. I suspected there would be more to follow after the tale you told me of her adventure, and I kept my eyes open. Last night I surprised them together, though he had the wit to try to get out of sight until I drew him out of his hole. I can swear to it that I saw her in his arms."

"And you are sure that this is a fact, such as you relate, and not the exaggeration of a jealous brain?"

The statement was more than a surprise to Bartram who fancied that he had watched his daughter sufficiently to have detected some symptoms of this infatuation if it really existed.

"Jealous! I did not know that I was jealous until the time came that I had cause to be. Do you suppose that I can allow my promised wife to be mooning about to meet such men as this in the darkness?"

"Very natural that you should object, and not a whit more strongly than I, as her father. If this be so I shall have to take means to see that it is not repeated. But perhaps it was the man that was to blame. He may have met her incidentally, and presumed on the service that he had rendered her?"

"I was inclined to take that view of it myself, and charged him with something of the kind, but she came brazenly to his aid, and so hampered my movements that between them I came off but badly. This before witnesses, mind you, that had been attracted to the spot. Then she actually took his arm, and they went off together."

Canter grew a little cooler as he thought that he detected something like gratification in the face of Jason, spite of the fact that his daughter was concerned in his discomfiture.

"There must have been something in the meeting that you did not understand. I will question Blanche in regard to it—in your presence if you wish—and perhaps her answers may throw a better light on the matter."

"I care for no explanation, since I saw everything with my own eyes. What I demand is that the girl understands what she is to do; and that there be no nonsense about what is told her. A spade is a spade—there is no sense in calling it anything else. If you do not intend to keep your part of the contract I know what I shall do on my side of the house. The man who undertakes to play me for an idiot gets badly left."

"Come, come, colonel, I have no intention of drawing back. I sometimes think that I was a fool in not making a better fight at the outset, but it is too late to think of that now. The only thing to do is to go on as I have been going, and trust to luck and your mercy as long as I can."

"Luck won't save you when I shut down," gritted the colonel, "and if you lean on any mercy to be found in me you had better be toeing the line most mighty straight. Just so sure as you step to the right or the left of the mark as we agreed to draw it, I'll hang you high as Haman."

"For Heaven's sake, not so loud, my dear colonel. I do not think that any one can hear you but it is as well to be on one's guard. You must remember that if I have sinned you have not been altogether without guile, and that when I become desperate there might be some revelations to be made on the other side that would require a new appointment to be made at the Golden Stream."

"That kind of talk might have done when I first began to crack my whip. Now I have your gauge too thoroughly to be afraid that you will try an open fight—and I don't intend to show you any chance for a secret one. It is not much that I have asked of you, anyhow. Another man under the circumstances would have scalped you alive. You are not the only man in Hard Pan whose destinies I hold in the hollow of my hand, and I have touched you the lightest of all. Why, if it was not for its being feared from you it is as like as not that you would only be too glad to have such a proposition made as I gave you."

"To mate my child with a villain?"

Jason spoke with a spirit hardly to be looked for under the circumstances, and the colonel looked at him sharply before answering.

"A villain, perhaps; but a prosperous one. I tell you it is honest admiration that makes me seek your daughter. I could have had as large a share of your wealth without the incumbrance. I would rather have won the girl without the interference of her parent; but if that cannot be done then the father has got to talk, and that mighty plain, too."

"As plainly as you wish, though this is not the best time for me to speak, when she is no doubt excited over the interview of last night."

"What of that? Bring her to her bearings at

once; a delay will only get her more and more wound up in this sport."

"Very well. I am ready to follow your advice, even though my judgment tells me that it is a mistake. I will call her in, and speak to her in your presence, if you say so. There can be no mistake then as to the exact words that I have used."

Though Jason had his flashes of independence, it was not hard to see that he stood in wholesome awe of his visitor, and did not want to run violently contrary to his wishes. With a sigh he rung a bell that called to his presence Miss Fanny French, and her he desired to summon Blanche.

Miss Bartram was aware that the colonel was with her father, and had a fair idea of what was to come. She entered with a cold nod to the colonel, and stood near the door, her hand resting upon the back of a chair. A look into her eyes would have shown that she was ready for resistance.

"Perhaps I have trusted too much to what I thought you could easily see were my wishes," began Mr. Bartram, mildly.

"Colonel Canter has been a suitor for your hand with my permission for some time, and I had hoped that it would not require any explanation of those wishes to bring his suit to a successful termination. He tells me, however, that from some things he has seen he is inclined to think that there is danger of your becoming interested in an unworthy object, and has requested me to speak to you, and have matters brought to an understanding."

The cold silence with which this was received gave little encouragement to either of the gentlemen. Mr. Bartram continued, however:

"What is this he tells me about a meeting with the stranger against whom I cautioned you? Certainly you did not join him at the bridge by appointment?"

"Certainly not, and I doubt if he would have spoken a word to me had he not found it necessary to protect me from this man's insults. I gave Colonel Canter my answer so plainly that it needs no repeating, and the way in which he received it could hardly induce me to look upon him more favorably."

"The lady is good at denial, but it is strange that I found just what I had been expecting ever since I saw the man in close conference with a member of your household who would not be too good to act as a go-between. But for that I would hardly have followed the young lady, last night, nor seen the remarkable interview. As to the answer that she gave me in the heat of passion, you can tell her that it must be reconsidered, and that it is not in her power to say no."

"I am sorry, my dear Blanche," said Bartram, taking up the theme where the colonel left off, "I would rather have told you in a milder way, but there seems to be no choice. I shall certainly use my parental authority if my request is disregarded."

"My dear father, we have never had a serious difference of opinions in our lives, before; but we cannot agree in this. Anything else, almost, you can command me in; but I deny your right to barter me away to any man, and least of all to a man like this. What power he may have to warp your judgment, I cannot guess, and perhaps it is well that I do not know."

Canter gave a short laugh, as he learned how nearly this astute young lady could guess at the truth.

"If you knew how mercilessly he will use that power if you attempt to struggle against your destiny, perhaps you would not be so firm in your refusal."

"I know nothing earthly that could induce me to alter my decision, and I hardly think that the heavenly powers will exert an influence in your behalf."

"And there is a third power that you seem to forget. I think it can break even your stubborn will."

"Things Satanic are most in your line, but I defy them. Right is right, and I will do nothing else, whatever may happen."

"Not even to save your father's neck?"

"No, not even for that. If I believed, or knew, that he had committed a crime that brought him within the pale of the law, as his daughter I would stand by him to the last, even though I had to follow him to the foot of the gallows, but I would never buy his release from that punishment by a sacrifice that I knew Heaven would never smile on. I say this once and for all, and you can be assured that I mean it."

The firm attitude of the girl startled her father, and made the face of the colonel turn livid with rage. For a moment neither of the men spoke. Then Canter hissed:

"By heavens, you will have the chance to see him swing, if that is your last word; and I'll win you afterward. You can spend the balance of your life, then, in considering if there isn't something better than doing what you call 'right.'"

"It is my last word; and if I have any influence with my father I would urge him to throw off your chains, at whatever cost; and submit to whatever penalty may be due for the

mistakes of the past, rather than submit for another hour to your dictation. I bid you both good-morning."

And very calmly she swept out of the room, leaving the two to stare at each other in undisguised amazement.

"Surely she will think better of it?" said the colonel, smothering his wrath.

"Never," replied her father. "She means it all, and nothing can change her. If there is to be a sacrifice, perhaps it is best that it should be made by the old instead of the young. If we cannot arrange on any other basis, you will have to do your worst."

## CHAPTER XIX.

### COOL AS THE COOLEST.

"CRACK!"

From a thicket to the right came the report, and a puff of smoke followed it when Harry turned quickly in that direction. As he heard the hiss of the bullet as it passed a yard or so over his head an instant before, he knew exactly what it all meant.

"They really want me, it seems; and want me bad. Glad of it. I always like to see a man with a strong, healthy want. It seems to do him so much good. But if that's the best this fellow can do, it is hardly worth while to go back after him. Let him practice awhile. So far, he's not dangerous over thirty yards; and under that distance, bushes or no bushes, if he can get the first shot he deserves to have it. But what is in the wind now? Sounds like a squabble going on there. May have to go back and take a hand in after all."

Harry had been out taking a quiet stroll to verify his opinion in regard to the Looney Lum bonanza. There were several places between the Golden Stream and the town where an ambuscade might be laid, but either he had not thought of any danger, or he was careless whether it came or not! After the hostile interview with the colonel the preceding evening, he might have known that this was no safe ground for him to venture on, and so the shot was not much of a surprise, though what followed it was. As he looked back he first heard voices under or beyond the concealing veil of branches; and then two men came rolling into view, locked in an earnest, hand-to-hand struggle.

They were so wound together, and in such rapid motion, that neither had a chance to draw a weapon, even if he thought of it.

In one of these men Harry thought that he recognized something familiar, and wheeling about, he returned toward the spot.

"Thar, dog-gone yer," exclaimed the uppermost man, with a vigorous punch at the face beneath, "I got yer whar I've bin achin' ter hev yer, an' ef yer can't take a hint, I'll see ef I can't beat some sense inter you—blame yer fur a lop-eared, tangle-legged, half-baked slubberdegullion!"

The topmost man was Baby Bunting, and he proceeded to carry his threat into execution in a way that left no doubt that he meant every word he said.

"What's the matter, Baby?" asked Harry, who could not help laughing at the way in which the undermost fellow was roaring alternate threats and pleas for mercy, and all the time making desperate efforts to get his arms from under the knees that pinned them to the earth.

"Well, boss, I found him taking a sittin' shot at a traveler goin' along ther road, an' I jest told him he better wouldn't, an' sorter threw up his arm like, an' he began ter let inter me ez ef he war a bull-tarrier a-huntin' rats. I hed ter soothe him down a leetle, an' blast him, I've a heap mind ter see thet he stays soothed."

"Oh, come off! He's not going to hurt anybody. Here, you, get up!"

Baby rose to his feet, though his hand was on his revolver, and he kept a close watch on the man he had been grappling with. As the latter did not move at once, Harry gave him a hearty kick, aimed at the spot where it seemed to fit best, and that brought him up with a howl.

"Now, you get out!"

The High Horse pointed down the road, and without a word the man sullenly moved away.

"But ain't you going ter ask no questions?" asked Bunting, surprised at this summary dismissal of the case.

"Nary question, Baby. He can't tell me anything that I don't know, and it would only be offering a premium for lying. You know the hound?"

"Like a book. It's Hank Carter, an' he's good fur a center at a hundred yard. He dropped his gun when I bounced him, an' I reckon I may as well tote it along inter town. Ef I hadn't bin scoutin' round you'd never hed a chance ter see it."

Baby dove into the bushes, and in a moment returned with the weapon in his hand.

"Thanks, Baby, and I'll remember you on next pay-day. You can walk along with me a little piece, though I don't know that I care to be seen coming into camp with you for a day or so yet. See here, I want to go into the military business; raise a little army, you understand. The pay will be pretty good, and



there may be a chance for fun. Don't care if I get a rough sort of crowd, if they are men of sand, and able to make their weight tell. I can handle anything so they don't come into the lay-out to sell me out. Do you think I can recruit a dozen honest sort of ruffians, that won't be afraid to fight?"

"That's what. You kin count me an' Dad in; you kin pick ther rest. But mebbe you'd better let me an' Dad look over ther roll afore yer make any details. Thar's men, and other men."

"I'm aware of that fact, and I'll look out for the other men. You might give me a list beforehand, and I can look them over."

Baby Bunting went into the scheme with enthusiasm, and gave the description and names of a dozen men he thought would fill the bill. Then they separated, some little time before coming to the town.

As two nights had passed without Harry having made his appearance again in the saloons around town, the boys were beginning to think of something else, and were surprised when he came sailing into Mike's in what might be called the early part of the evening. Some considered that the visit was made for the sake of bravado, while others were curious to know how he was going to take it when the dealer told him that he was barred out of the game at that house. From the account that had come floating in from Halcyon, it seemed likely that he would proceed to make it extremely lively for the boys.

Mike might have saved himself the trouble of getting his stick ready. The High Horse from Halcyon never approached the tables. Instead he lingered near the bar, and struck up an acquaintance with some half a dozen men, who were by no means loth to receive the attention. They patronized the bar sufficiently to leave Mike no excuse for grumbling, and finally went off into a corner together, where they held a low but animated conference.

As they returned toward the front of the room, all seeming to be of one mind, they passed a thin-visaged, wiry-looking little ruffian, who took occasion to mutter in a low tone, but one which could reach the ears of the sport:

"The Yankee has heard zat a man is after him, and looks around for a gang."

"Wrong, my friend, for a dollar," replied the sport, turning as if on a pivot. "I am looking for some men that I know are white to join a little army that I am raising. Big pay and plenty of fun. You look like the kind of a man I want; won't you join the crowd?"

"Ze white man nevaire join ze crowd such as you speak of. Zat is for ze canaille. Ze rope is too plain at ze othaire end."

"Ha, ha! That's your joke, is it? Why, my friend, if you were half as bad a man as you think you are, that same rope would be snatching you bald-headed at this. Why, you would kill a man for two cents, and throw in a grave for a dollar. They pointed you out to me as Rafelle, the cut-throat, always waiting for a job, if he hadn't one on hand, though about half the time you have one."

"It is one lie, zat he say zat tell you so!" exclaimed the Frenchman. "Rafelle nevaire kill ze man except in ze fair fight! Sacre! Ze man vat say otherwise is a thief and a rob-baire!"

"Your say so again; and mine the privilege to believe as much of it as I choose. If that apology don't suit you, you're mighty hard to please."

The apology did not seem to suit Rafelle at all. He took a step forward, and half raised his hand as though he had an idea of slapping the face of the sport, but drew it back, and scowled darkly.

"If you walk straight on, without ze talk, zare would be no need for ze apology. I care not to talk viz you. Eet is ze unfortunate zing ven a gentleman meet ze skoonk. Ze skoonk must have ze needle ov ze road."

"Well, you've got it, haven't you? And I don't show much signs of kicking."

"I understand zat you wish to insult me. Zat is sufficient. Eet is ze satisfaction zat I must have now, and wiz ze weapons of ze gentlemen."

"That's all right—though it's a little rough on the weapons to get into the clutches of an animal like you. Sorry that business engagements won't allow an immediate settlement, but any time to-morrow, after daybreak, you can have all the satisfaction that you want, if it takes a ton. And any place will satisfy me, from the public square in Hard Pan to the 'Frisco jail."

"But zat ees to-morrow, and ze man of honor cannot wait till to-morrow. Eet is now zat ze insult have been given, and eet is now zat eet s'all be wiped out wiz ze blood."

"Correct as usual, Rafelle, my jewel. I wouldn't have your slumbers broken brooding over this thing to-night, not for a dollar. Come for me at once. The door is open, and you shall have a stomachful at half price."

The cordial invitation did not suit Rafelle at all. The sport had hardly done him justice, for the Frenchman was not an ordinary assassin. Nor yet was he a man much given to taking a hand in the average shooting and stabbing

affrays of Hard Pan. He preferred to do his killing under the code; and for that reason he numbered a better class of victims in his private graveyard. He had taken a number of these excursions, the affairs mostly coming off by lantern or moonlight, and every time he slew. It began to be understood that he was a professional duelist, who wanted his pistol in his hand and the time after sundown, and then was always fatal.

He would, however, have accepted the challenge of the sport for an immediate settlement if it had not been for one little circumstance that he was not slow to note.

"Ah, you tell me to come on, but you hold vat zay call ze drop. Do you take me for a fool?"

"Very true, Rafelle. I have that same, and it's according to Hard Pan etiquette to shoot when the other man begins to draw. You can have your choice. Get your gruel to-night, or save it up for an early breakfast to-morrow morning. Speak quick, for I have a heap of running around to do to-night."

"To-morrow morning it s'all be. V'at is ze name of ze friend upon whom my friend s'all call?"

"If you want to send in any explanations where you want to be buried when the little circus is over, you might send around to Mr. Hudson, at the Giraffe, after I have a chance to post him. Don't let your man put on frills, or Jem may sit down on him. He will make play to have it out with the fists, and that would leave you out in the cold altogether."

"My friend s'all call; and eef you s'rink from ze meeting, you s'all be drummed from ze camp altogether."

"Never a shrink will you get out of me, but after the election has closed, and the vote is counted, some one will be apt to shiver. So long. Spend the night in prayer, and it won't be so rough with you in the morning."

Then Harry moved away, and there was a buzz of excitement, as the odds were being laid on the result of the coming event.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE DUEL AT DAYLIGHT.

OF course Hurrah Harry knew what he was doing when he deliberately picked a difficulty with Rafelle. He knew it had to come some time, and there never was a man more willing than the sport to meet another at a distance of considerably more than half way in a delicacy of this kind. There was no particular reason why he should not have finished it up off hand, except that he wanted to occupy the attention of certain parties on the following morning, and this was as good a way as any.

For the balance of the evening he went on with his recruiting, though the terms of the enrollment were by no means definite, and as far as outsiders could find out there might be nothing in it, though there was an idea afloat that an expedition was on the carpet, and that the whole outfit would drift out of Hard Pan some night without any one being the wiser until it was gone.

Jem Hudson agreed to act as a second without much urging, though all that he knew about his duties was that he was to see fair play. And that he admitted was not going to be an easy matter if there was really the gang behind the Frenchman that Harry seemed to think. And he warned the sport that he was to meet a man that had both skill and courage.

"Of course he has. Would I be wasting my time on him if I thought he was going to run away?" asked Harry, indignantly. "I thought his friend would have been around by this time. I begin to suspect that it will be Colonel Canter, when he comes. All you want to do is to insist that the meeting be across the bridge, and that we toss for choice of weapons when we get on the ground."

"Hand hif we win we take fists, hov course," chuckled Jem, in great glee.

"Oh, no," answered Harry. "We don't want to do anything of the kind. As a stranger in the town I don't want to take any snap judgment on him; but I want to hit what is his own game, and beat him at it. If we have the choice I want to try him on the sword, provided he brings the articles on the field. I have an idea that is what he is aiming for, and when I get the fun to going he will be wishing that there was no such item as a sure thing on his books. Good-night. If his man don't come along soon don't wake me. It will be time enough to get the particulars in the morning."

He went off to bed as calmly as though he was not booked for what might well be a fatal meeting in the morning; and was asleep before Colonel Canter came in, though the arrival was not much longer delayed.

Very plainly the colonel did not much care to deal with Hudson; but the old ring experience of the latter stood him in good service. He knew just what his principal wanted, and as there was nothing that seemed unfair in the selection of the ground, he got it.

Hudson himself did not sleep very soundly that night, and Harry seemed the fresher and more unconcerned of the two, as, after a cup of

hot coffee, they set out in the early morning for the battle-ground.

The news of the coming affair was all over Hard Pan, and any quantity of spectators were already on hand when the two from the Giraffe arrived at the vicinity of the bridge.

There was a piece of level ground that was suitable for any kind of an encounter, and the lay of the land around it was all that the spectators could ask. If Harry had been looking out for their interests he could not have found a place for miles that would have suited them better. By common consent, the little level place was kept sacred for the use of the principals and their seconds, and the audience selected positions at what each man considered the safest distance.

The Frenchman had not yet arrived, but after a little he and Colonel Canter were seen coming leisurely down the hill, and their appearance was greeted with a cheer. Nine men out of ten on the ground were backing the local talent, and the tenth man was not shouting very loud for the stranger.

Along with the colonel came Jack Dempsey, carrying a suspicious bundle, though nothing was further from the minds of the three than that there would be any occasion for it if the High Horse from Halcyon had any say in the matter. Leaving his principal the colonel advanced to meet Hudson, who shook him warmly by the hand as they met.

"As the challenged man your principal has the right to name the weapons, so long as they are those sanctioned by the code," said the colonel. "But I understood you to say that he was willing to toss for choice. That is satisfactory to us; and I would suggest that no time be lost in finishing the formalities and setting the men into position."

"My hidea to a charm," answered Jem. "Heads or tails?"

"Tails," cried the colonel, as the coin spun in the air; and, "Heads!" exclaimed Jem, as he pointed to it as it lay on the ground.

"If mounseer don't object we'll take his own frog-stickers, and use the swords that we see you have brought on the ground."

The surprise of the colonel was evident, but he was too shrewd to express it verbally. He took the weapons from Dempsey, and extending them allowed Hudson to take his choice. Then the ground was selected, and the two men placed face to face.

There was a strange absence of grace in the attitude that Hurrah Harry assumed; and when the spectators compared the appearance of the two as their blades crossed there was not many there who did not think they could pick out the winner in the game of death that was to follow.

As far as strength was concerned, the advantage was probably on the side of the sport; for, though but little if any taller, he was heavier built, and it was known what strength was within the corded muscle that lay along those magnificently developed arms. But Rafelle could push a sword home with a power that would send it through and through. He had a strength of his own that never seemed to tire in any of the contests in which he had been engaged; and his skill in wielding his weapon was more than a legend. It had been seen and admired until Hard Pan had come to glory in it as something peculiarly its own.

The moment he felt his antagonist's blade quiver against his own, and saw him break ground under his own careless attack, Rafelle was convinced that he had the issue of the contest in his own hands, and he felt a savage delight in the fact.

When Colonel Canter had approached him on the subject of slaying, or badly wounding the sport in a duel, the Frenchman had hesitated. With the certainty of swords as the weapons he would have felt perfectly willing to undertake the work; but with the wonderful luck that the stranger was understood to have, it was just as likely that the fortunes of the game would give him the chance to select pistols; and when fairly used, Rafelle, good shot as he was, could not feel an actual certainty about the end.

And at first he had thought that if things went to his hand he would do no more than lay the sport up for a few weeks, with a wound that would be just serious enough to convince him that Hard Pan did not intend to tolerate his presence. After the two came together all that was changed. The chaffing which preceded the challenge awoke all the bad blood that was in the duelist, and though his face wore a smiling mask he intended death and nothing else.

He was almost certain that he could end it all at the very beginning, but that would be a disappointment to his friends, who had come out to see a show, and a show he decided to give them.

Colonel Canter was perhaps the only man there who, at the end of the first five minutes, doubted that the sport was overmatched, and must lose except for a fluke. Two or three times Rafelle seemed to touch him lightly, piercing his clothing, even if he did not draw blood. And yet Canter was not satisfied.

"Keep cool," he muttered, in a voice barely loud enough to reach the Frenchman's ears.

"I believe the villain is playing you, after all."



Try him with your best thrust, and see if you can reach him. If you ever throw yourself open he will pink you yet. He's dangerous till he's dead."

The two men had fallen apart for a breathing spell. It seemed to be the sport that first drew back, and yet Rafelle had not followed him up. His breath came but little faster than usual, and his arm was as yet untired, but in his own mind the Frenchman was not altogether satisfied with the way in which his careful play had been met. If he had tried ever so hard would his thrusts have come any closer to a vital point? Was the force that awkwardly put his lunges aside in reality a guard of steel? Was the strained, anxious look on Harry's face only assumed? The caution of Colonel Canter was scarcely needed to put him on his guard, and he decided that he would deal in no more exhibition play. The colonel was an amateur of no mean force, with whom Rafelle had been keeping his practice up, and his caution made the Frenchman more suspicious than ever.

The cessation of hostilities was only momentary. The Frenchman suddenly raised his sword and advanced with a stern look on his face as he began an attack to which all that had preceded it was but child's play. It was a succession of feints, but so rapidly were they made that they might well have confused any man whose head was not of the clearest. His sword always seemed ready to continue the thrust at a possible opening, and yet he always recovered his guard in a way that showed Canter that he was holding himself ready for a parry at any time.

The sport's face never showed that he felt in any greater danger than before. He kept the point of his weapon for the most part directed toward Rafelle's face and his wrist moved slightly. Somehow, he was equal to the occasion, without the spectators being aware that he was exhibiting any particular skill, and they began to wait anxiously for Rafelle to execute the *coup de grace*.

The end came before they looked for it. Rafelle thought that he had found his opening, and thrust in tierce.

The body of the sport swayed gently, his right shoulder rose slightly, his wrist parried lightly, and then—he stepped back, looking curiously at his antagonist. By an overhanded movement in *carte* he had changed his parry into a thrust, so quickly given that it was never seen, and scarcely suspected until Rafelle sunk slowly backward, his hand still grasping the hilt of his sword, being pressed convulsively against his right side.

Jack Dempsey was the recognized surgeon in the camp. He had made some effort to make it his profession before he became a gambler, and since coming to Hard Pan there had been no dearth of gun-shot wounds and knife-thrusts on which to get up his practice. He saw at a glance that the duel was over, and that Rafelle was hard hit.

"Keep cool, Frenchy," he said, in his average tone; in secret being not altogether dissatisfied at the result.

"You don't want to squirm around much with a hole like that in the neighborhood of your vitals. You are good for a long, nice rest, anyhow. Let me see how bad it looks. Perhaps I can pull you through."

"Be still, and see how the chances look. Do you want him to die on your hands?" said Canter, somewhat bewildered at the sudden turn of affairs, and holding his hand suspiciously near the revolver at his belt.

"Nary die, if I can help it, and I don't think the sport went in to kill this time. Don't try any foolishness with that gun, either. He's watching you, and the crowd won't stand it. They just began to understand that he can fence round Rafelle any day in the week."

## CHAPTER XXI.

### FARO WITH A FLYER.

DEMPSEY told the truth when he said that the crowd would not stand any foul play on the part of the colonel. Jem Hudson and his friends there, if Harry had not, and the proprietor of the Giraffe, was of the kind to stay by the man that he went out with until the last horn blew. Then, the victor in a fair contest always attracts more or less of a following, and in this case it was large enough to extend to the sport a regular ovation.

There was a rush of men to shake hands with Harry, while others began to crowd around the fallen man to see how badly he was wounded.

Although Jem did not anticipate any present trouble over the issue of what every one present could not help but admit was a perfectly fair fight, he did not think it advisable to loiter on the ground. He took the arm of his friend, and suggested that it was time that they returned if they wanted to get any breakfast, and that he would leave some one behind to bring them later intelligence of the condition of the fallen Frenchman.

So, after a little hand-shaking and congratulating that he could not well escape, the man from Halcyon took his departure, followed by an admiring body-guard.

"Oh, no, he won't die, and there was nothing

strange about it," was Harry's answer to Jem, when they were fairly on the way back. "I was abroad for a number of years, when I was younger, and learned how such things are done. And of late years I haven't got out of practice. If there are any amateurs that are better, or many swordmasters that are as good as your humble servant, I have been so lucky as not to meet them."

When the crowd had returned to town, and had begun to think the subject of the duel about talked out, there was a fresh topic started, that was almost as interesting. Some one came post-haste to find Colonel Canter, and in the brief period that this party remained with him it was noised about, without any one exactly fathering the report, that Looney Lum had at last located his bonanza, and that it was perilously near to the Golden Stream. The most wonderful thing about it was that he had taken possession in force, having a gang of men behind him, and that it was said that they already had opened a tunnel far enough to conceal them all from sight.

And yet everything, so far as was known, had been accomplished that morning. It seemed strange that a man like Looney Lum could move so quietly and surely, and there was some speculation who was behind him; for, as yet, it was not known by the community that Hurrah Harry was at his back.

Colonel Canter suspected at once, however, as he hurried out in the direction of the Golden Stream, and it was his haste that furnished an item in the list of particulars that went the rounds of Hard Pan. As a fact, Looney Lum had not made any effort to jump the mine in which the colonel was interested—nor was he infringing on the claims of any one else. The spot where he and his men were at work was several miles beyond, somewhere among the fastnesses of the gulches on the other side of the "Shivered Pine," and as far as the records went to show, though the ground had been prospected over, the indications were so unfavorable that no serious attempt at mining had ever been made in that vicinity. Yet if the sport was indeed behind this movement it meant something. He always seemed to win, and was not the kind of man to throw away time and money without a clearly defined object beforehand. Either the army that Harry had recruited meant that they had something worth the defending, or that an attack on the Golden Stream was meditated. The colonel went promptly to work to prepare for the latter—and to carry the war into Africa.

Meantime Hurrah Harry lounged about the camp for the rest of the day and discussed the possible movements of Looney Lum in a way that made those who talked with him doubt that he had anything to do with them.

So unconcerned did he appear that Jem Hudson himself, who knew more of Harry's acquaintance with Lum than did any one else in camp, was thrown entirely off the scent. When evening came, and his own business was not demanding his attention, he began to sympathize with his friend over the unfortunate condition of affairs. He suggested that perhaps the result of the duel might make the bankers a little cautious over offending him too openly, and that though they would probably run things on a limit that would not allow much profit, he thought that the sport might get into a game that would at least furnish some amusement.

"Oh, don't worry about me," was Harry's answer. "If I had been wanting to fight with the tiger I guess I could have found some way to get into the jungle. What is the matter with my furnishing the capital, and you drop it on the table? I would just as soon risk your judgment as mine, any day in the year. Suppose we go around to Mike's and proceed to pull the animal's tail, just as hard as they will let us, eh? What do you say? Bet you a dollar that we clean them out before they know that the cyclone has struck them."

"Hall right. It's been some time since Hi made a night round town. We'll let the tiger a pelt him the breadbasket, hand see him 'ell growl."

"That's the ticket. But first we'll try the Ivy-Green. If we don't get a square show there we can expect a regular freeze-out everywhere else. Leave your pocketbook at home. I'll furnish the capital, and you take half the winnings."

At first Jem was inclined to demur to that part of the proposal, but when Harry pointed out that he would run enough risk to make up for the small sum they would be likely to risk, he finally consented to the sport acting as banker for this night only.

Arm in arm the two entered the Ivy-Green, when the evening was fairly advanced, and everything going on under full swing.

"Set 'em up, Johnny, and good-evening, gents, all and every. Jem and I are out for a night of it, and we begin at headquarters. Join us, if you please."

There were half a dozen there that Harry had spoken with on the occasion of his previous visit, and these all stepped forward at the invitation, and they were backed by as many more who were anxious to form the acquaintance of the sport, or to get a position at the bar. Some

of them congratulated him on the successful ending of his affair that morning, and others were content with a nod, and a lift of the glass they held, with a muttered, "Here's to us." Then there was a little more talk, which gave time for the dealer to make up his mind what he was going to do; and then the two adjourned to the other room, followed by a knot of the curious ones, who wanted to see what was going to happen.

The Ivy-Green, being high-toned, and all that, there was little danger of any wanton insult, and Harry did not care to have any trouble there. He bowed carelessly as the dealer looked up at him, and with a winning smile remarked:

"Good-evening, gentlemen. If you are in a lucky vein to-night, and feel like rusing the bank, pray don't forget that one hundred is the flyer, and we push back anything over that figure if the looker-out sees it, and don't pay in any event on anything heaped up over the limit."

"But gobble it in, all the same, I suppose," remarked Harry, with the same kind of a silken smile. "And of course the privilege on the turn is as usual."

"Certainly. And I believe the bank claims all sleepers. But we won't quarrel about that. The deal is just about to commence. Make your game, gentlemen. The queen is soda, and all cards are in the box."

"Thanks for the information, but I am afraid you halloo before you are hurt. I don't tend to indulge in the detestable vice of gambling to-night, and have warned my innocent friend there where the thing will lead him if he follows it up. If he still insists on a twirl at the jungle king, I can only look on and be miserable."

Then Hudson invested a hundred in chips, and when he had placed a few of them the deal began.

The first bet Hudson made was lost, but after that it began to look as though the hundred-dollar limit was not going to be much of a protection to the bank. When Jem took up a couple of chips to lay down on the ace, the sport put in his oar briskly.

"Oh, come now, Hudson, what are you trying to give them? Get some more checks, and put on the limit every time. If you can't make, break, and be done with it. We have no time to waste on the tin-pot game anyhow."

The bank passed the slighting remark by, and Hudson heard only the advice, which he followed without hesitation, and came out winner so much the more when the ace came out on his side a little later on.

"Now then keep crowding, anywhere and everywhere, as long as there is a dollar in the weasel-skin. I tell you, there is a heap to be done with a century for the flyer if you press the game, and the cards keep coming your way."

"Hand a 'eap to lose, biff they don't," suggested the ex-pugilist, as he put up a hundred gain on another card.

He won again, and having lost but once during the deal, was some hundred dollars ahead when they came to the last turn in the box.

"Double the limit, and string your cards for the turn. You can or you can't. It's an even thing on the chances, and with the luck running your way you are sure to win. If the streak don't run out, we'll bust the bank, flyer or no flyer."

If he had been left to himself it is quite likely that Hudson would have entirely ignored "the turn," and the privileges that it allowed. He played faro occasionally; and now and then took a hand at one of the various games of "short cards" that flourished in the town, but it was only for amusement, and when he had a regular streak of "hog luck" did not know what to do with it.

At the low-voiced hint of his companion he doubled his stake and as he laid it out added:

"Deuce—tray—Jack—how does that strike you?"

"Hits me right where I live; and I'm betting any man a thousand even that it hits the bank for eight hundred. I ought to ask four to one but there is nothing small about me. You can or you can't, and I'm betting that you can."

The challenge was not exactly shouted, but Harry's voice was raised loud enough to be heard around the table. The dealer looked up, with an unpleasant gleam in his eye.

"The bank will take that bet on those terms, and you can lay the money right on the edge of the table."

"Well, the bank won't. Do you want me to hoodo my pard's luck? You raise the limit and do the regular thing when I win, and I'll come in fast enough. Or put some one else at the box and come around on this side of the green cloth and I'll back the old man's game till I make you sick. But I never bet against a game with a smaller limit than the bank."

Harry said a good deal, and the bare words would not have sounded so well if repeated, but he got them off in such an easy, good-natured way, with his everlasting, silken smile behind them, that it was a little hard to find the exact point of offense in them unless it was



wanted pretty bad. The dealer appeared to hesitate, and Harry added:

"If it's any inducement for you to raise the limit I will guarantee either to follow Jem's lead on the turn, or call it some other way. And if he kicks when he loses I'll pay his little stake, just because I would be working bad medicine on his game. Can man say fairer?"

"Oh, you are just the easiest person to please that I ever heard of—as long as you have things your own way. If Mr. Hudson don't object, go on with your outside bets. The bank won't raise the limit."

#### CHAPTER XXII.

##### HARRY OPENS A SWEEPSTAKES AT MIKE'S.

THE magnanimity of the sport's offer struck the spectators as being something out of the common. The only question was, whether it was not sheer bluff. That was to have an answer, too.

A sport, whose face Harry remembered to have seen about the house, stepped up quietly.

"It's a pretty loud bet, but I guess you mean it, and when I can get such odds I generally invest. A thousand even, I believe you said."

Harry was rather inclined to think that this man had received a wink from the dealer, but he asked no questions. He knew that he had all along been having tacit recognition as a mighty chief, and he did not want to strain his tether.

"One thousand I said, and the money is waiting. If there is any idea of crowding the mourners, I might say there is five hundred more in the boodle, that is yearning to talk in the same way. Do you want a shy at it? Or will any other gentleman cover it? And I'll back my luck with a few hundred more that I have in bank. It's fun I'm after, and I'd as soon go broke now as any other time."

The local sport did not care to raise his offer, and no one else answered to the bold defiance, so that the chance to bankrupt Harry was lost—or the opportunity to still further load his pockets with Hard Pan coin. Then the turn was made—and certain as fate, out came the deuce and the tray, while the jack lay in the door.

A buzz went around. Even the dealer lost something of his imperturbability. Whether the two played in a partnership or not they had some two thousand dollars between them, and if that had all come directly from the bank, it would have given it a pretty hard shake, for it was understood that it closed when it lost twenty-five hundred. If he could keep it up like this the man from Halcyon was a chief indeed.

"Hit them again, and show no mercy," advised Harry, as Hudson apparently hesitated on the opening of the next deal. "The medicine is working to a charm, and everything is going around on wheels."

Thus encouraged, Jem pressed the game as hard as the limits would allow, and though he lost twice in the deal, he came out away ahead. But this time he lost on the last turn, which Harry permitted to pass without any particular comment on his part.

It is not worth while to follow the play through the next couple of deals. Suffice it to say that finally Harry sprang into the air with a prolonged "Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

The game was over for the present, and Hudson, with a little outside assistance, had closed the bank.

"Now, pard," added Harry, slapping Jem on the back, "we'll take a little fling around at Mike's, and then go home to our virtuous couches."

Mike appeared in blissful ignorance of what the fates had in store for him until the twain actually made their appearance in the house.

And yet, when they had worked their way through the crowd to the tables, they found that there were about a dozen extremely disreputable fellows in the game, each piking away, with a handful of white chips, and a ten-dollar limit on the game.

Behind the lay-out was Chet Delain, who was supposed to fear neither men nor angels, with a revolver at his elbow.

"Well I swear!" laughed Hurrah Harry when he had taken in the state of affairs.

"When I accepted the agency for the Foreign Missionary Society, and came to work among the heathen in Hard Pan, I didn't think that I was going to meet with such success. If three days will half-close the games, a month ought to bring the whole outfit around to my way of thinking. Come! Here's twenty-five hundred in good money, that I want to add to or lose. There's no use to go into a ten-dollar game, and if Mike will take a hundred dollars for his floor till the fun is over, I'll open a sweepstakes, and give you a show for fun."

"An' phat would you be afther priposin'?" asked Mike as he stepped forward with lowering brow, and his hand on his revolver.

"Get up a field of six at two hundred entrance, and I'll put the whole wealth in my pocket. The man or men that can get it out in ten minutes by the watch can have it. Everything but muscle barred, and no kicking allowed. I don't want to do any slaughter."

"It's as good as a circus, and I'll bet five hun-

dred they down him in five minutes; and enter one man for the stakes," said Delain, looking up at Mike.

"Ther hall's always opin fur sport av they pay fur phat's bruk. An' Oi won't charge a cint av it's ther nick av ther sport," was Mike's answer to the appeal, and the rapidity with which Chet Delain closed up the deal showed that the men who were playing were only as Harry had suspected, a gang of cappers.

Hudson listened to the proposal with a troubled face. He knew that nearly every man there was more or less an enemy of the sport, and he was very doubtful if Harry would be allowed fair play, if it was found—as he hardly hoped—that he was holding his own against the proposed odds. From the way things looked Jem suspected that an arrangement had already been made to double-team the man from Halcyon, if he appeared at Hoodlum Hall, and this was giving them just the chance they wanted. The pugilist did not care so much for an attack by a gang, in which they could both go as they pleased, but this left him out in the cold—for Jem had few enemies of his own—and might cost a power of money besides.

But Harry was not of the advice-taking kind. He laughed at the whispered cautions of his friend, and answered cheerily:

"The offer is made, and the money waiting. When I say a thing I mean it, and don't take water if the snag looks big enough to swamp the ark itself. These fellows don't know anything about knocking out, and I am right from the college where they teach such things. You see they don't do any cutting, and I'll take care of the rest."

It took some time to arrange the team, for the men who were willing to engage in the tussle were not generally provided with the entrance fee, and it required a little figuring for the backers to make out how they were to secure their profit. If Colonel Canter had been there himself he would no doubt have arranged it all in short order.

Finally the open space was cleared in the middle of the floor, and Chet Delain advanced, with a hand full of notes to complete the preliminaries.

The six men that were to meet Harry were bunched by themselves, and one would have thought that a glance at them might have weakened his belief in his own invincibility; but though he looked them over it was only to see if he had ever met them before; and he turned to Delain as frankly as though he felt that he was among friends.

"Yes, the offer goes as it stands. Hudson, here, will cover your five hundred, and any other little side bets that may be offered, up to the extent of his surplus. I might say that it would be of advantage on the other side if slugging was barred at the outset; but that is for you to say. It was not in the offer."

Side bets were not numerous, and the hint about hard hitting was not accepted. Harry threw off his coat, put the money in a breast pocket in his shirt, handed his belt to Hudson, and with folded arms waited for the rest to get ready. He glanced up at the roof and down at the floor to make sure of his ground; and then came the attack.

Six men against one! It never seemed so much like a sure thing as when they came rushing on toward the sport.

The bar-room in which the seance was being held was a large one, and gave considerable space for the movements of the combatants. Harry met the rush with one of his own, that was briefly but rapidly executed. He was pretty confident that none of the gang known as Highbinders were in front of him, and he tried much the same tactics as he had used on the first night in town, when attacked by that gang. As he came in distance he stepped sideways, taking one of his antagonists by surprise; and, throwing his hands on his shoulders, he suddenly swung himself into the air, and entirely over the entire party. Before they had time to wheel, he was turning them over on his hip at the rate of about one a second.

Of course that was only temporary; but while it lasted he was giving an exhibition that made the Hard Pan spectators shout with delight, regardless of the fact that from the way some of their friends were striking the floor they might be getting broken bones.

When two powerful men grappled with him at the same time, the flurry appeared to be near its end.

Not a bit of it!

The High Horse stooped until he had his arm under the man on his right, and gave him a heave and a swing, that tumbled him across several of those who were just trying to rise from the floor. Down they all went in a heap together, while Harry, giving a little to the tug of the fellow on his left, swiftly dodged under his arm, getting a good grip on thigh and shoulder. Another heave and another man joined the majority on the floor.

"Walk in, gentlemen," said Harry, as he lounged back a little. "The circus has only begun. The gentleman with the iron jaw has not fairly got extended, and ten minutes by the clock is a mighty short time."

The taunt was not needed, and it looked as though his time might have been better employed; but the exertion that he had been making had told somewhat.

Though he had the chance to be tumbling over his antagonists while they were at his mercy, he preferred to use a little time in recovering his wind.

The space for resting was brief, but he made it count when he began again. He dodged the first man up, tripped the second, and came back at the first again, catching him a fair side-hold.

The man thought that he was in the arms of a giant.

A fair wrestler, he had considered himself to be, but he was a child now, and found himself in the heap before he had fairly begun to extend himself.

The six were scrambling up in all directions, now. The sport had been having it all his own way; but the first five minutes were not nearly exhausted, and the rough play had not begun yet, nor had anything serious been done to any one. To the general surprise it was Harry who had been forcing the pace all along the line; but what would he do when the gang got a fair hold, as sooner or later it seemed that it must.

Chet Delain looked anxiously at the clock. Though so far the sport had never shown any symptoms of a desire to avoid punishment, or to prolong the struggle for the sake of gaining time, after what he had already seen he began to believe that the High Horse could win his money, if not the sweepstakes, unless he was seriously disabled, and that very soon.

"Quit your fooling, and knock him stiff," he hissed, as four men darted at Harry. "He's slippery as an eel, and you can't get his boodle as long as he can wiggle. Slug him in the neck."

"That's the game, boss, that we're tryin'; but it ain't jest so easy," said a fifth man, as he dodged warily back, and watched for a chance to get in.

The four heard the advice, and acted on it without wasting breath in words. Straightforward they leaped, striking as they came. Harry saw that the time for play was over, and henceforth it was all to be vicious work. He sprang back, dodged, shook his head, guarded, until he had received the attack of every one of them, and had fairly developed their intentions. Then he sailed in.

#### CHAPTER XXIII.

##### ONE ON SIX.

WITH a little more room it would have been easy for such a man as Hurrah Harry to have kept himself fairly out of harm's way for a long enough time to win the stakes; but large as was the room, and completely as the floor had been given over to his use, the time was bound to come when the roughs would here get hold of him if he trusted solely to his wrestling abilities. After the confusion that followed their first unexpected overthrow they scrambled up as fast as they went down; and Chet Delain made a mistake, when he suggested slugging.

Of course Chet did not know how hard Harry could hit, though he had heard that he had knocked out Hudson. But here were six men. While Harry was knocking one of them endways what would the rest be doing? Winning his money, of course. And doing the work of Colonel Canter for another thing.

It was with a wicked glee that he saw the whole six for the first time making what seemed effective play, with the sport acting as though his hands were getting very full. Then—he could not see exactly how it was done—the sport straightened himself in the midst of the storm of blows; and one of the men came driving back like a cannon ball, all doubled up, and sound asleep when he struck the floor. Two others staggered back from a couple of sharp props before a third threw himself on the back of Harry and seized him with a regular garrotter's hug, his left forearm under the chin, his right hand tugging at his left wrist.

No time was lost trying to break that gripe. Before it had done any damage Harry had reached down, caught the man by the knees, raised him from the floor, and thrown himself backward, in time to escape several blows that were aimed at his apparently defenseless face. The sport's feet twinkled in the air an instant as he rolled backward, heels over head, while his living cushion lay with the wind completely knocked out of it. Two men were out of the ring—as far as the first five minutes went, anyhow.

Harry came up from the floor as if on springs, but he raised three men with him. As he went down they had flung themselves at him without any regard to their partner underneath, and he had no time to get away from them, or strike before they were inside of his guard. The man at his back thought he had a safe thing of it if he did not allow himself to be caught as the other man had been; and when the sharp point of an elbow struck him with tremendous power on the mark, he hardly knew what made him so weak.

As he loosened his hold, Harry grasped the



two left, each by the throat, and thrust them back to the full length of his arms.

That grip of his was like steel. Harder and harder it pressed, until the slowly closing fingers seemed to be eating through flesh and bone. Wildly the men struck at his smiling face, that had not yet become reddened by his exertions; but their blows failed to connect, and their useless force only served to so far unbalance them that Harry could swing them around, exactly in the way of the headlong dart of the two who had been reserving their strength till they thought that they could make it tell.

As he felt the four come together he let go his hold and began to strike.

"It's no use, Chet," he said, softly, when he rested himself a little later on Jem Hudson's offered knee.

"The first five minutes are gone and over, and I only hope I won't break a few necks in the next five. I can lift a half a ton without straps, and hit like a trip-hammer, if I do say it myself. For their own sakes you had better tell your boys to play it a little lighter if they want to stay in the game to the end. I haven't hit to hurt as yet, but I may have to play for keeps if they try to kill."

Since his bet of five hundred was lost Chet could afford to be a little cooler, and he spoke in a low tone to the four who remained in the game. Two had jumped it entirely, and the others were not as sanguine as they had been. And evidently they were shy of coming to a close unless it was in some shape that would take the sport at a decided disadvantage.

At first they moved as though endeavoring to surround him, but when he sparred back, so as to keep them all in his front, they changed their plan, and came in with a wilder rush than ever.

That was what Harry wanted. If they had taken their time to it from the beginning, they would have stood a much better chance of winning. Cowardly though it might have been, some one would probably have found a chance to creep in behind and deliver a blow on the neck that would have ended the fight.

The rush of the four was a desperate one. There was a little fortune right at their fingertips if they could only get it. If the High Horse had not been a phenomenal man he would have gone down before that raging charge.

Instead of that it was the other men that went down—and they went down hard.

Then came a wild yell from all over the house, the lights went out, and in the darkness there was the sound of many rushing feet. Mike's lambs had become savage wolves, and in one ravening pack cast themselves at the stranger.

The extinguishing of the lights was Harry's salvation. He had anticipated some such move, and as he struck his fourth blow he sprang to Hudson's side.

"Out of the window, quick! and don't you mind if you take sash and all!" he whispered, as he snatched coat and belt of arms from the hands of the host of the Giraffe.

As the darkness came two or three men who were in their way went down, and then, before the cursing crowd knew what had happened, the quarry was out and skurrying down the street at a great rate.

"Nothing like being your own stakeholder," said the High Horse, a little later, as they neared the Giraffe. "I'll make you a present of that five hundred if you can collect it off of Chet Delain, and I have had an elegant sufficiency of Hoodlum Hall in mine. Never worked so hard for so little money in my life. But, confound them, I'll show them that if they bar me out on the tables I'll find some way to make it even on the floor."

"Hit's hexciting, hand that's the fact," puffed Jem, whose wind was not as good as it used to be when it came to a sharp run. "Hit beats the Nottingham roughs; but you did slay them hellegant, hand no mistake. W'y, hold Cribb 'isself would be nowhere halongsides hof you hif you went in the ring."

"I brought you back safe and sound, and that's as much as I asked when I saw how things looked at the time of the wind-up."

Then they went into the house, and without waiting to hear Jem unburden himself—and he knew that the worthy landlord was full to the lips—Harry went off to bed. He did not feel the strain of the evening, but he knew that it was there all the same, and under such circumstances he always took a rest. And it was about the conventional Hard Pan bedtime anyhow.

The sport had not yet settled with Hudson on the faro account; but he had the purse which he had defended still in his pocket. After the experience he had gained since striking the town it would have been natural, one would have supposed, for him to take some precautions, but he rolled off into the realms of Morpheus without another thought on the subject. His money gave him no trouble, and he had been in too many bar-room brawls to lie awake thinking about this one.

He slept as soundly as he ever did for some hours—and then was wide awake in a flash. Some one had lightly touched his window.

The night outside was reasonably cool, and the window was closed, but there was no fastening

to it, as the person outside evidently discovered. The sash was raised about half an inch, and then suffered to drop softly down to its place. Although Harry glanced in that direction he could see nothing. There was a curtain that shut out all view both from without and within, and rendered the interior of the room perfectly dark.

"The party outside knows what they are about, and it's me they are after," thought Harry, who ran to colloquisms even in his thoughts.

He felt for his weapons, and found that they were all right. Instinct always made him have them where they could not be reached by anyone else, and where they would be immediately available. He softly slipped out of bed, partly dressed himself, and by the time the window began again to raise slowly he was standing in one dark corner. He held a knife in one hand and a revolver in the other, while he curiously waited to see what would come next. Remembering that perfect silence would show that he was awake and on the alert, he leaned forward a little as the window rose higher, and began the regular, long-drawn breathing that had been interrupted at the first suspicious sound. His face was so near the head of the bed that it would take a sharp ear to detect the difference.

A slight hesitation when the sash was up told the sport that the men were listening, just as he supposed they would, though it took but a moment to satisfy them that everything was all right. Without the least noise the curtain was pushed aside, and several men entered the chamber.

"What under the sun are they up to now?" thought the High Horse, as he saw them reach out and carefully receive some bulky, but by no means heavy object from the partners that then followed them in.

"It's Othello and Desdemona, eh—with a man of my size for the gentle victim! Smother him with a pillow, and if that won't do take a feather-bed. And a man with a club along to see fair play. Not exactly this evening, my dear gazelles. Some other evening, when the signs are right."

He had hit it at the first actual guess. There was no more delay now, and noiselessly they approached the bed, guided by the sound of the regular breathing, which still continued. Two of them held the small mattress poised in the air, and the club that Harry had predicted was not wanting. A third man held it in his hand, ready for use when the time came. With such weapons, and the knives that were behind them, failure looked like an impossibility; but knowing the man they were to engage, they were determined to have no false strokes. The curtain had been carefully dropped to its place, and when everything was in readiness, a bull's-eye was flashed on the bed to mark the exact spot to make the cast that was already coming.

What followed the flashing of the light was the surprise of their lives. The bed was tenantless, and from beyond the head of it came the voice of the sport:

"Hurrah, boys! I'm just hungry for fun, and could wait till the last man got in. If you think that you can hold up your end with knives, now is the time to try it on. After to-night it is nine to nothing that you will never have another chance."

Although the light of the dark-lantern was turned full upon him, and the forms of the intruders could be but indistinctly seen, he coolly dropped the revolver in his left hand back to its scabbard, and before they knew it was coming, began the attack himself.

With a heave and a jerk he shot the bedstead out from the wall sufficient to get fairly behind it, and then one of his magnificent movements tossed it right on top of the gang.

It was a dangerous movement to attack these men, all of whom were armed with knives, but Harry was in his own castle, and he meant to keep it clean. Without hesitation he sprang forward on the top of the bed, and began using his knife with a dexterity that showed him to be a master of the weapon.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

##### THE SPORT UTTERS WISDOM.

THERE was a great scrambling to get out from under the bed, and that was the way that the sport told how to get in his work. The lantern had been dashed from the hand of the fellow that held it, and was on the floor under the mattress, but Harry's ears were as good as a candle. He heard every man as he moved, and reached for him accordingly. Generally he hit what he struck at.

The plan had been to have the foray executed in a perfectly noiseless manner, and pistols had been discarded from their armament for fear there should be too strong a temptation to use them. When the crisis came there was noise enough to stock a pandemonium.

It only lasted a moment. When the first man of the retreat sprang through the window, and Harry was snatching up the lantern that he had kicked out from under the mattress, the rest of the villains were all ready for the game of "Follow my leader." There was not one of them that had not a wound—and not one of them was seriously cut. Chance or skill—it

made no difference which—had marked them all, and the room was beginning to look like a slaughter-house.

With the lantern in one hand, and the revolver that he drew in the other, the sport stepped back and watched them to the last man as they took the flying leap into the darkness.

"Might have taken a prisoner and made him sing, I suppose, but what would have been the use?" muttered Harry, arranging the bull's-eye so that the light was turned on the window, and changing his bed to another corner of the room.

"I don't want to follow the thing up. I suppose it was the gang that I laid out at Mike's, with perhaps Canter's money to urge them on; but I know any way that if I don't keep my eyes open I'll go up the flume. I want to be careful about wiping any one really out. They might get up a lynch party that would be hard to get away from. A dozen ruffians, with what seems to be right on their side, can lead a whole town by the nose. If this thing keeps on they may begin to suspect why they organized the neck-tie party at Halcyon. Queer how I have to be continually in the center of a cyclone. There is not naturally a more peaceable fellow in the world, but somehow the world won't let me alone. Here they come at last. May as well explain it all now as in the morning. All right, come in!"

The latter part was spoken aloud. Some of the neighbors had heard the racket, and now that the noise had ceased, wanted to know what was the matter. By the time that the door was open Hudson had joined the investigators, and the sport explained it all in short order, after which he put them all out, and went to bed again. He heard them faintly as they started under his window to follow the trail of blood, and was asleep before they lost it, a few hundred yards from the house.

Of course there was no idea of running the gang down. No one had been killed so far as heard from, and Jem Hudson was willing to wait for further developments before making too much fuss about the invasion of his premises. The one who had been most nearly affected took all as a matter of course, and why should any one else waste time and run into danger?

As for the local government—that had enough to do attending to claim-jumpers and horse-thieves.

When Harry arose, sometime after sun-up, he showed no traces of his adventures of the night before. He ate his breakfast with the hearty appetite of an honest workingman, and after a brief conversation with Hudson went to Mercator's Bank to make another deposit. He was getting to be quite a capitalist, and expected to be much more so before he got through with Hard Pan.

Pedro received him cordially, taking him into the private room where he was accustomed to hold his confidential conversations.

"Thou hast told me nothing of thy plans, but thou hast asked a number of questions, and a blind man could see that thou art behind Looney Lum in this movement of his. Colonel Canter can see it, moreover. To strike you he will attack him to-day, and it is as well to be on thy guard."

"Always am on guard, Pedro. But what sort of shape does he propose to get there in, now. If I haven't been fighting him all over town, and beating him bad, every time, I am unable to winnow out beans when the receptacle is wide open. What makes the fool so bitter on a man that would have let him alone if he hadn't put himself right in the way?"

"Verily, I know not, save that most likely there is a woman in the case."

"Ought to be from two to a dozen, to account for the way he is piling it up against me. It gets me."

"It is the daughter of Jason Bartram, chiefly, if the things I hear be true. He expected to wed both her and the interest of Jason in the Golden Stream, as well as certain other valuable possessions. Thy coming bids fair to interfere with all that. And there is some other reason that is not so plain. Hast ever met him before?"

"Not so far as is known at last reports. But what is this about Lum? He has the clear right where he is if the records are worth a continental, and he has a crowd that can't be climbed without a battle; what are they going to do about him, and why?"

"On occasion, and proper expenditure of money, there is the form of law that can be obtained at Hard Pan, and Canter proposes to invest. He has a claim for certain moneys advanced, which he will aver was or were in the form of what you miners call a grub stake, that would entitle him to a half interest in whatever Lum might find. He will have the poor fellow arrested with all due regard to the law—such as it is—and no doubt seize the mine, or whatever development he can find, on his own account. It seems not certain to him whether there is really a discovery behind it, or whether it is some plant of thine to damage him or the Golden Stream."

"And what time will the doors open for this little circus of his? Or what does he count on,



the High Horse doing while this thing is going on?"

"Thou art ever busy with thine own affairs, and as thou hast seen, when there are none of thine own on hand an elegant sufficiency can be made for thee. It might have been better for thee to have bitten harder last night."

"The cowardly dogs! If I undertake to interfere in Lum's favor they have it set up to shoot me under the shadow of the law? Bless their dear souls, they haven't seen me handle the firearms yet. Why, they did try to assassinate me on the road the other day and I didn't think it worth while to spank the rascal till I drove his brains up into his head. If they once open the ball in force they will find what Hurrah Harry is really made of. A thousand thanks for the warning. I'll put up any reasonable amount in the hands of any man that handles the law here with any show of authority, and for the rest, my revolvers and I will see that I come to no harm, and that Lum's claim is not jumped while the suit is going on. Who runs the law mill where Hard Pan has its legal grists ground out?"

"Such things are usually in the hands of Jason Bartram, and his decisions are supported by the revolvers of the community. He has been regularly elected mayor and justice—and there is a police force here if you can find them."

"Good heavens! And where have they been since I came to town? Why, if I had known that, I would have put my head out of the window last night, when six men went for me with knives, and hollowed for them like a good fellow. I am afraid that they and I will not be able to agree, if we meet."

"Most likely not, since they are all of Colonel Canter's choosing. Perhaps they were with the six."

"Most likely. Well, I must keep enough in bank to cover Mike's stake, which I understand he has left with you, and I'll spend the rest, if it takes it, to see Lum through. So long, and look out for Canter's claws."

Harry's bank account was beginning to assume respectable proportions in spite of the fact that he had drawn two thousand for Looney Lum, and as he went down the street he could afford to assume the airs of the prosperous citizen. That there were few to love him and none to praise gave him no concern, nor that he was only one man against what seemed to be a pretty unanimous town. He gave more of a start when pretty Fanny French stepped unexpectedly into his path and gave him a cheerful good morning, than he would have done if Canter and all his heelers had suddenly materialized.

He returned the greeting, however, and acted as though he intended to pass on. That was what Miss Fanny did not intend to allow. She swept up to his side and looked up after her sweetest style.

"You don't seem to care much for your friends, Mr. Harry. Have you so many old ones on the list that you do not care to add any new names? I thought you would have been up at the house before this. I am sure you would not receive a warmer welcome anywhere else."

"I am not sure of that, my little friend. I find Hard Pan a pretty warm place, all over. So warm is it sometimes that it is actually hot. And I notice that Jason has not been so pressing in his invitations. I do not remember to have even met him, and I wouldn't like to swear to what he looks like."

"Mr. Bartram never says much but I am sure he would be glad to see you; and I know that Miss Blanche thinks that you ought to come. I as much as heard her say so. You have no idea how high a place you have in her regard."

"I am afraid that you will never let a person die for a little flattery. Come now. Honestly speaking, do you think that if Miss Blanche was thoroughly satisfied that I was thoroughly convinced of her gratitude for the little services that I admit that I rendered her that she would be very anxious to have my presence at the parental mansion? And what do you think that the other gentleman would say to it? It might make trouble and it could do no good."

Fanny looked bewildered.

"The other gentleman! who is he? what do you know about him?"

"I thought so! Own up! If any objectionable party is to be worried into the house there is some one else that the lady would rather make the fight on. What is his name? It may be that I will have a chance to do him a good turn; and I don't want to hit him some time by mistake."

"Oh, indeed, you must be mistaken. That was all over long ago. Some one has been telling you a pack of nonsense. I really would like to know who it was."

"My child, I have not discussed Miss Bartram with a living soul, but it does not require a prophet to tell that there is some one in the background. Miss Blanche is not of the romantic kind to linger by the river in the twilight, without an object. She was waiting to see some one, and the some one did not arrive on time."

A new light broke in on Fanny French.

"I do believe that you are right; and to think that she never trusted me. But the young man

went away from Hard Pan some time ago; and I never heard that he was coming back."

"Miss Bartram expects him, at all events. Did Colonel Canter know anything about him?"

"I don't know that any one did but me. But Mr. Bartram suspected; and told her that it wouldn't do at all. There might have been a fight over it, for the young lady has a will of her own, but he went away, and then there was no use to make a fuss about him. I thought she had given him up. And no one knows where he went unless she does. It's strange."

"No one, eh! Well, perhaps it might be worth while to ask Colonel Canter, if the young lady herself has no late advices. What did you say was his name?"

#### CHAPTER XXV.

##### TURNING THE TABLES, AND NOT A SHOT FIRED.

"I DIDN'T say anything about his name, but it is Walter Forbes."

The dark hint was thrown away on Miss Fanny, so she simply answered the question.

"And I will venture to say that he is not my style at all."

"Oh, no. He is poor and honest; and, if you won't be offended, not half so good-looking. I never did see what she found in him. He looked as though he might have some grand relations back East, and I fancied that he had gone back to them. Perhaps, though, he went away to make arrangements, and set a time to come back, when she was to meet him. I know that she has not heard from him since he left—she could not deceive me in that."

Harry swallowed the insinuation and the compliment together, and walked along thoughtfully for a moment before speaking.

"I suppose, Miss Fanny, that I have no call to interfere, but I have a suspicion that if there is anything in what we have been saying, something may have happened to the young man. If he don't turn up in a day or so, I should be sure of it. When a youthful, poor, honest individual don't keep a tryst of that kind, it is proper to suppose that he has lost a limb, if no worse. Would it be safe for you to hint as much to the young lady, so as not to leave her altogether unprepared for the revelation that may come some day soon?"

"I will speak to her, you may be sure, and will tell her, too, that if she needs you she can find you the best kind of a friend."

"That goes without saying, of course. Now, run on. I have my hands just full of business to-day. And—yes, it will do no harm to tell you. If you see the book in the library, it might do you no harm to read 'The Courtship of Miles Standish,' and let me know what you think of it. Good-morning."

Perfectly at his ease, Harry strolled along until he reached the Giraffe, and he entered the door like one who had nothing better on his hands, and had come in to stay.

In reality, he simply passed through, and when he had reached the rear of the hotel, skurried away at a rate that soon took him out of the town. He judged that, though some one might be watching the front, the building was not surrounded, and that it might be some time before his departure was suspected. The movement against Lum's bonanza had not yet openly begun, and he desired to get there before the procession arrived.

Pedro Mercator had not been deceived—he got his information direct from headquarters. Just such an expedition had been planned, and it would have been on the move before this, had not Harry used up several of the army on the preceding evening, so that at the last moment they failed to put in an appearance, and their places had to be supplied. The duty to be entrusted to their hands was of rather a delicate nature, and the men to take their places had to be chosen with caution. It was well along in the afternoon when an armed force carefully approached the place where Looney Lum was supposed to have established his headquarters.

The point had been held under surveillance ever since the news had come that he was there, and at work; but no one had ventured very close, for there was a sort of "hands off" in the proceedings of Lum and his men that made intrusion seem unsafe.

The leader of the representatives of the law was a man named Cyrus Doebler. He was as honest as the best, and had the respect of the entire community. He never attempted to regulate things on his own account, but when he was started out he could be a terror to evil doers. Harry had not yet seen him, for he had been out of town ever since the sport's arrival. The movement against Lum would have been a day sooner had it not been postponed to await Doebler's arrival.

To the surprise of every one, they found a regular little fortification confronting them, in the shape of a stout little log hut, which had been erected in the last day or so. Of course it would not stand a regular siege, but if it was properly guarded it would keep off a sudden rush of roughs, or protect the mouth of any tunnel that might be under it. Evidently Looney Lum, or whoever might be behind him, did not intend that the claim should be jumped

without a chance to defend it. As the posse came within hailing distance, two men stepped out of the door of the cabin.

One of the men was Looney Lum, while the other was no other than the High Horse from Halcyon.

"If you please, gentlemen, don't intrude," said the sport, in his easiest manner. "If you will take a look around, you will see certain stakes set in the ground, that clearly mark the boundaries of this claim. If there is any especial business on foot, we will be pleased to meet you on those limits, and listen to particulars; but while we have perfect confidence in Marshal Doebler, old Trust died some time ago as far as some of the rest are concerned, and we propose to protect ourselves from the world go. If that don't suit the crowd, let them wait till friend Doebler has finished his legal business, and the rest can have all the chance they want in the world to sail in."

Harry stepped forward as he ceased speaking, and Lum followed a few paces in the rear, while from the loopholes in the cabin the muzzles of about a dozen Winchesters protruded.

Doebler was not the sort of man to allow himself to be bluffed in the discharge of his duty, but just here he saw no reason for going further, since the man that he was after was coming out peacefully to meet him, and a glance at the cabin was enough to convince him that the force there was about equal to his own.

"If dis man, Looney Lum, comes peaceable, dere is no more to say. Dey tells me to take a crowd, and get him, dead or alive, and dey say somedings about to take the mine, but dat is not in dose papers."

Doebler held up a formidable-looking legal document, and began to read it aloud, as the two men stepped into fair hearing distance of a conversational tone.

Very true it was that this was not a civil process at all, but a warrant of arrest on a criminal charge. Bartram had suggested that it might be necessary to give security, and proceed with ordinary regularity, if the mine was to be taken from Lum by the officers of the law, and that he himself should hold possession until the case was decided. As that was undesirable trouble, and the warrant would doubtless serve the end as well, in getting up a disturbance, and throwing the place open to attack, the criminal proceedings were employed. Harry listened attentively.

"Why, see here. You men will get yourselves in a heap of trouble," he exclaimed, as Doebler finished reading. "You can't make anything out of that but a breach of trust, and my partner, there, is able to prove there's not a word of truth in the thing, anyhow. As for this find, and Lum's interest in it, I have the witnesses to show that I struck the first pick here, and found the first sign. I let him in on the ground floor because he was deserving if poor, and had stood by me when I wanted him to. Why, he opened his eyes as big as the full moon when I showed him the spot, and give him the chance for a share in the bonanza. I tell you, he is going to be one of the big-bugs of Hard Pan, as soon as we get things to running, and these folks want to play him light now, for down goes their crockery when his big brass pot comes into the swim."

"Dat is all right. If he comes along it's all I ask. Unless dey put his property in my charge I don't want to meddle with his mine. Will he come?"

"Of course he will. He's coming now; but those gents that are edging up in the rear want to keep on their linen. There are twelve men in that cabin that can shoot to a hair, and they will do it if any one tries to jump that claim."

"If Dad Horner leads the gang they will be just as likely to jump it on their own account, and leave no one else a smell," said Chet Delain, who had come out as a deputy. "If Lum is wise he will turn over the plant to Doebler, till this thing is settled. If he don't the boys will see that his rights and theirs are protected against all outsiders."

It had been something of a surprise to see that the sport offered no resistance to the arrest. A fight had been looked for from what had been seen of his style. It might be that the experiences of the past few days had caused him to lose his sand. Though he was pursuing the best course for his own interests it did not fit in the hand as arranged by Colonel Canter, and his secret pards.

"Just one word, Doebler," said Harry stepping a pace or two backward, and surveying the marshal calmly. "I understand that this is all a put-up job; but what I want to know is if you are in it. My idea is that they don't want to attack the mine now—but to wait till they can get us both out of the way by some shadow of law. I want to catch on whether there is to be an execution on the mine as soon as my back is turned. If that is the plan, we'll settle that before we move a step. We have a valuable property here, and don't intend to be beaten out of it by any such crowd as trains behind Colonel Canter."

"It is all as square as anydings," answered Doebler, "but you don't want to be wasting time. If you are coming, come now."



"Yes, that's the talk!" shouted Chet, suddenly drawing his revolvers, an action that was imitated by the rest of the posse, who took their cue from him instead of the marshal.

"Down him, boys! He means to snatch Doeblor, bald-headed!"

As he spoke Chet looked over at a low, rocky ridge, that commanded the spot fairly well, being at moderate gun-shot distance. The backward movement of the sport had so far uncovered him that a fair marksman from this ridge could pick him off without much if any danger to anyone else unless it was Lum.

But there was no answer from the ridge, and the action of Doeblor was unexpectedly prompt. Out came his own revolvers, and back he sprung, in front of Harry, while he faced the crowd.

"Hold on dere! Dis is my prisoner, and I'm running dis ding. Der man who crowds in here runs against a snag purty quick. Sol!"

The party in the cabin had shown unexpectedly good discipline. Not a movement nor a sound did they make. If they had come rushing out, or if even Hurrah Harry had drawn his weapons, there might have been some excuse to open a fusillade; but with no one save the marshal meeting the menacing movement, and the strange failure of part of the plan, it was not so easy to crowd along to a general *melee*.

Before Doeblor's stern front, the angry effort expired as suddenly as it was born.

"Dere is no resistance," he said, in a firm tone, "and if dere is to be shooting I must begin it. You gentlemens what comes mit me go back in der same way. If dis gentleman dinks dere is a job to take his mine, he may stay and look after it. It was dis Looney Lum we got, and der rest is not according to law. Delain, you take der prisoner by der arm, and march him off. Dat will be de end of dis ding."

Chet hesitated, but Doeblor's eyes were on him, and they said that the marshal was in earnest, and did not intend that there should be anything more like mutiny in his posse. Delain whispered a word in the ear of one of the men, and then obeyed his orders.

The party moved off with their prisoner. It was a partial defeat of the Canter interest, and one that Chet did not entirely understand. When the man to whom he had whispered joined him later on, he was more mystified than ever at his report.

"I found 'em all right—six ov 'em—but they was all tied up, hip and thigh, and they sd Injuns hed done it, an' gagged 'em besides. They war willin' ter shoot, but they didn't see how!"

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### A TIMELY WARNING.

"By heavens! Bartram is going to back the sport!" was the exclamation of Colonel Canter.

It looked something like it to him, at any rate, although an unbiased man would probably have seen only simple justice in the delay granted on account of the absence of material witnesses, and the acceptance of bail pending the trial.

The fact of the futile ambuscade, and the singular way in which it had been handled, was of course concealed from the town; but the men had arrived about as soon as Doeblor and his party, and when there was a chance to see the colonel one of them gave him a more detailed account of what had happened, though there was still as much mystery as ever about the way they had been baffled.

The men had, as they thought, succeeded in getting into position unobserved, and some little time before the marshal had arrived with his force. They were all ready to move at the orders of Chet Delain, or sooner, if they saw the chance. If they could have worked their own will, they would have dropped the sport quickly enough, when he made the first and only show of resistance.

But while they lay there waiting, they found themselves prisoners before they knew that there was any movement on foot against them. At the backs of each a brawny Indian rose up, and to aid them there were three or four more, who held their weapons in a threatening manner, as they commanded silence. Seeing that the odds were so much against them, and under the promise of personal safety, they quietly surrendered.

They were quickly bound and gagged, and the Indians then departed as silently as they had come. If Delain had not sent a man to look after them they would have been there yet. Who these Indians were, or why they interfered, was a question that no one was ready to answer. Of course, it was most likely that the sport had put them there in ambush, to surprise the ambuscaders; but where did he get them? If he had brought them to that region when he came himself, he was even a more dangerous man than they had supposed, and it was a pity that the irregular method of the discovery precluded the use of the point against him. Canter did suggest that they were part of the little army Harry had been known to recruit; but all of the men he had raised in the camp were handling their rifles in the cabin, and the rest of the town was

accounted for. It was certainly a mysterious affair; and though the colonel did not like to admit it, even to himself, he was beginning to get scared. If this was the way it worked there was but little use to follow up the scheme he had been holding back as a *dernier resort*, and press the charge of having deposited bad money with Pedro Mercator. The ambuscade business seemed to work the wrong way, and it was as likely as not that the result would be a more disastrous defeat than ever, especially if Bartram was going to show the white feather.

That was the way that Canter felt about it, and if it had not been about as dangerous to let go as to hold on, it is likely that he would have thought seriously of giving up the contest, and allowing the sport to remain the recognized chief of the camp.

Unfortunately he had gone so far that he could not well stop without involving himself with the men that he had been using as his tools; and it was not certain how soon they might give him away in the future, if they found him losing his grip. Perhaps it would not help him to win Blanche Bartram now, but all the same, he intended to have her, and to make Hurrah Harry vanish. With as little delay as was consistent with his own safety, he began to concert his measures. If lead, steel and muscle failed, something else would have to be tried.

Of course there was a good deal of curiosity to know all about Looney Lum's bonanza. When Harry had deposited two thousand dollars, as the amount of bail demanded in the case, and the prisoner was free to go, it was surprising how many hands were waiting to shake those of the latter. That some of them had lately been with the marshal made no difference. All talked as though they were glad of his luck, and wanted to hear the full particulars.

Lum, for once in his life, did not care to make an oration.

"Men and brothers," he said, "I'm much obliged to you all—and I'll tell you the rest when we get down to bed-rock."

Then he slipped away, and Harry had him smuggled out of camp in some mysterious manner; so that before they were done looking for him he was safely out at the mine, and under cover of the Winchesters of his men.

Although the sport had no further present designs on the pockets of the people of the town, and on some accounts it would be advisable for him to be nearer to the claim; yet he did not intend to be bluffed out, or allow any one to suppose that he feared whatever the strong gang that was evidently arrayed against him might plot in regard to his safety. When night fell he was around at the Giraffe again, and as unconcerned as usual.

Hudson felt like sticking closer than ever to the man that was being so roughly crowded, and took Harry aside for a little advice, the substance of which was that if he would settle down as a business man there were some very good people in the place who had not yet appeared on the stage as Harry had seen it, who would perhaps be able to back him up in a way that would ultimately lead to the discomfiture of the rough crowd with whom he had been dealing.

"That's all good enough, Jem," said Hurrah, taking the advice in the friendly way in which it was given.

"If I was anybody else I might try it on, but it's rather late in the game to swap hands, and Hurrah Harry generally stays as he starts. If the respectable, influential gentlemen haven't seen enough to convince them, it's time for some one else to run the town; all I can do is to allow Canter, and the men that he is backing, and all the other roughs, if there are any, to introduce more evidence. The only thing that I don't like is that I have you more or less mixed up in my affairs, and some of them may take a notion to go for you before the show is over."

Hudson expressed his perfect willingness for them to come on as soon as they choose, and thought that he could do for any of them.

"I guess you could, James, if they allow you fair play, but that they won't do. Some night they will set fire to the Giraffe, and up we will all go together. But if we get a sight of the rascals trying it on, we'll make them sick, won't we, old man? You bet we will. Good-night. I'll bunk in early. I have something special on hand for to-morrow, though I don't care about the outsiders knowing it."

There was more than a jest in what he said to Jem in regard to the possibility of the hotel being fired. If they couldn't get rid of him any other way, he had no idea that they would hesitate to remove a few innocent outsiders along with him. Still, he hardly thought that pitch of desperation had been reached as yet.

"When I commence getting in the fine work, and they really have something to squirm for, I guess they will be after me in good earnest. At present I ought to be able for their one-horse little traps and ambuscades."

In such a way ran Hurrah Harry's thoughts, as he closed his eyes, and he went to sleep without taking any precautions, depending on his own quick and highly-trained instincts to scent any danger that might approach. He did not even bolt his door—and to tell the truth, that

would have done little good—and it was only a glance he took, to make sure that his bed was not in range from the window.

If he had taken the fewest precautions that would have satisfied a timid man he might have made an astounding discovery, and perhaps precipitated a catastrophe.

If there had been no danger he probably would not have thought of the subject at all, or have treated the advice of Hudson in quite a different way. Yet his instincts did not prevent his sleeping as soundly as usual; and he did not awaken quite as promptly as he had on the invasion of his room the previous night.

Yet he awoke with all his wits in their usual place; and springing noiselessly out of bed he seized by the wrists the person who had come so softly into his room.

The wrists, however, were round and yielding, and in the darkness though he was, Harry knew that it was a woman that he had captured.

The attack did not disconcert her. She was panting, but it was only through haste.

"It is I," she hurriedly whispered. "I but lately learned the plot, and I feared I had not time to warn thee. Quick! A moment more and it may be too late. An infernal machine has been arranged to blow thee to atoms; and this time there is to be no failure. Come!"

She strove to draw him away, never seeking to break his hold, but only to urge him toward the open door.

"The daughter of the stars, as I am a living sinner! I guess the biggest danger was to you when you came in without knocking. Bless your soul, if I had been inclined to fly off the handle, where would you have been? I had my fingers on the hammer, when something told me to go slow. Take it easy. It is a long time till morning. You ought to know that Hurrah Harry don't often run from danger that he can't see."

"But I never knew that he held a woman where every moment might be her last."

"That is so, little woman. Run along, and I'll illuminate, and see what I can find. Clear out, now."

He dropped her hands, and spoke sharply, even as he scratched a match and looked around for his lamp.

She did not move a step, but folded her arms, and stared at him by the flickering little light.

"Not a step unless thou goest. And in a moment it will be too late for that. If thou art too cowardly to run, say so. We can but die together."

"Ha, ha! You know how to find where I live as well as though you had known me for an age. Here we go, and if there is no danger we will never forgive ourselves. It will be time for the fool-killer to arrive, and we ought to be his first victims."

He caught her up as he spoke, and glided out of the room, closing the door behind him. She was by no means an infant, but he carried her with graceful ease, never stopping until they were at the other end of the corridor. Then he placed her gently on her feet.

"If the danger is so pressing ought we not give an alarm? I don't want to see Hudson and his guests go sailing up in a balloon, and perhaps it is not too late to pitch the infernal machine out of the window. Where is one to look for it?"

"Be not alarmed for the rest. The men understand their work. The rooms next to thine are tenanted to-night, and it was intended to kill thee, but go no further. If an alarm was given it might send some one into a danger that will all be over when another moment or so passes. And I would get away, if it be possible, without discovery. Yet, one question. Art thou really anxious to know more of the fate of one Walter Forbes, of whom thou hast spoken within the last few hours? And if thou couldst, wouldst thou bring him again into the land of the living?"

"Hello! You are the daughter of the stars—or something else. Of course I would. It would suit my hand, and please a very estimable young lady. Can you help?"

The answer to his question was the sound of a fearful explosion in the room they just had left.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### EVERYTHING WRECKED BUT HARRY.

"Say nothing about me," whispered the girl-woman, as the noise of the explosion was dying away. "Walter Forbes is living, and can be found. Perhaps I may be able to help thee in the matter. Poncho Poncho has some power, as those who had hidden themselves this day to work thy death could swear if they knew that the mysterious Indians were her men. Thou wilt bear it all in a day or so if thou hast not done so already. Farewell."

She melted out of his detaining grasp and flitted away like a shadow, leaving him to explain as best he could how he had escaped the death trap that again had been set for him.

Harry did not attempt to follow her. He hastily went back to his room. There was noise and confusion all over the house, but the general drift was not in that direction. People wanted to get as far away from the spot as



possible; and no one stopped to make his toilette before going. Such a scampering out of half-clad and altogether frantic individuals had never before been known in the history of the Giraffe.

Hudson was not as impressible as his boarders. By the time they were out he was at Harry's room with a lantern, and calling to the High Horse from Halcyon to know if he was still living. He understood what had happened without any telling; and as the house did not seem to have been shattered by the first explosion he did not anticipate any more danger.

"Of course I'm living. Hurrah Harry is mighty hard to kill; but the room will need some repairs before it will be as snug as when I took it. You can put a pair of folding doors in this partition wall without having to saw a joist; and it wouldn't be hard to back a stage in out of a storm, through this hole in the front of the house. Oh, they took a sharp stick when they came after me this time."

Fortunately, there was but little fire kindled, and that Harry, in his cool way, had already almost entirely extinguished. When the landlord brought his lantern into the room he could have almost wept for the destruction that had occurred. Harry's safety was the only thing that reconciled him to this new dispensation of Providence, and from the way he talked at large, and threatened dire punishment, the reconciliation was not more than skin deep.

The most fearful evidences of the power that had been at work were to be found in the corner where Harry had been sleeping but a moment before. The bedstead had vanished, and the small pieces into which it had been resolved, were mostly found outside the next morning.

"Hand were you sleeping there?" asked Hudson, his eyes as big as saucers as he held up the lantern to view the traces of the destruction that had occurred.

"Not very much. I can stand a good deal, but I couldn't sleep through such a racket as that. I removed myself a few seconds previous to the detonation. But the fun is all over, and I for one don't care to spend the rest of the night in answering questions. Give me a shake-down in another quarter of the house, and I'll try and finish out my rest. It might be as well to keep a little watch around here, for a time, though I think the danger from fire is all over. It was a narrow squeak, and don't you forget it. I wonder now, if a fellow really ought to be blamed for being cautious when he has such friends as I seem to have, hiding in the bushes?"

"You ought to 'ave a body-guard," said Jem, heartily. "When such things has these 'appens hit makes a hangel sick. Come with me. Bet you big they don't disturb you hin this 'ouse before morning."

The result was that Harry was put into another room, at the other end, and then Hudson went out to quiet his lambs, and lead them back to their folds. It was a long time before the last man was again tucked away in bed, for half the town was drawn there, and discussed the subject of the attempted assassination with long-continued interest. From Colonel Canter down, they were all on hand.

The colonel's face was not that of a disappointed man, and what he thought was not open to the public. He went away, after having a view of what he called the ruins, and was in a room in the shanty adjoining Mike's a few moments later, conversing earnestly with several men, who were as much interested as any in obtaining a history of the affair, and yet did not care to go and see for themselves.

After a while the most of these men went; and one or two others came. A little committee of ways and means was in session; and the outlook for the future did not appear very encouraging to them.

"After trying knives, pistols, rifles, muscles and dynamite I think it's about time to quit," suggested Chet Delain. "I don't believe there is water enough in the ocean to drown him, and if we took him down to the river, and threw him off of the bridge with his hands tied he'd just get up on his ear and walk off with the whole concern, river and all on his back. I move we don't. I am not yet yearning for any more of the sport from Halcyon in mine."

The third man was Don Silvio. This was his first appearance since Hurrah Harry had laid him out. It was something of a salve to his wounded pride to hear such talk as this, though it did not make him a whit less anxious for his revenge. When Canter looked inquiringly at him, he was silent in thought for a brief season.

"There is one that perhaps could help better than these cowardly hounds, who run away when their work has been only begun. When she does her share, the rest is with the man who asked her aid."

"Silvio is right. Every man must have his weak place, and as we have known every other means to fail, what else can we do but try old Heba, the Witch of the Knob?"

Canter spoke slowly, as if he was revolving the idea carefully. He certainly was not afraid to confide in his companions; and he knew without telling to whom the Don referred.

"Best go slow with the witch," cautioned Delain. "I never had the pleasure of her acquaintance myself, but I have heard some awful stories about her, and the gang she can call around her. She is just as likely to turn around and poison you, as she is to help you out of the snap that we never ought to have got into. I believe I would as soon take the chances and go gunning for him in broad daylight."

"It lays this way, Chet. He can get away with any of these tough citizens that we can put on him openly, and his luck will carry him through, if they try to bushwhack him. After what has been done we can't attack him ourselves, unless the advantage is a *leettle* on his side. That means sure death to us. The Witch of the Knob can do the business for us if she will, and if you don't care to face her I will. She can be found easily enough, if all reports be true."

"To say nothing of the fact that thou hast dealt with her more than once," added Silvio. "She is thy friend already, and would think it pleasure to free thee from an enemy such as this, who might some day be a danger to her and hers."

"That is something else that is not in the question. Before you go I would like to take your opinions, whether he ought to linger awhile, or go off by sudden death. There is something to be said in favor of both methods."

"Quick and Satanic," said Delain, upon whom the eyes of the colonel first fell.

"Let the camp think what it chooses, as long as we get him out of the road. If we leave him to fool around here a week longer, sick or well, there will be no living in the same camp with him. He stomps rough-shod over everything that's near his road, as it is."

"Yet a day or so had best be given," interposed Don Silvio.

"If he drops with any of us near him, it might be an unhealthy thing; and whoever gives it should have time to put what distance he thinks best between him and the sport."

"You are both right," replied the colonel. "No doubt he will be on his guard; and it will not be so easy to finish the work, even with the means at hands. Perhaps Heba will know best. I will ask her. I need not tell you that no hint of this must be given, even to our friends. If anything happens to him it will be credited to Captain Cowl. I have sent word in a way that I am sure will reach him, concerning the bet the sport has made, and the danger to the gang unless something is done. I had hoped that the captain would have shown his hand before this, but we cannot afford to wait. Now we will break up for the night, and I will start on my errand as soon after sunrise as I can. Keep an eye open while I am gone. If I am not greatly mistaken it will not take long to finish the work, and I will be back before night. If you, Chet, see a chance at Lum and his mine, sail in."

The conclave broke up and the men went away, showing no more signs of being assassins than before. Hard Pan would have been very slow to believe the truth, if it had even been proclaimed from the housetops.

Canter did not allow grass to grow under his feet the following morning. He started off in the direction of the Golden Stream long before his usual hour, and so far as he could see without being noticed by any one. At the Golden Stream he gave the men there orders for the day, cautioning them against straying toward the fortification of Lum, however much their curiosity might draw them in that direction; but to be constantly on their guard against anything like an attack that might come from there. Then he mounted a mustang, and apparently started to return to the town; but having retraced his steps a short distance he turned sharply to the right, and was soon lost to sight in the Hills.

#### CHAPTER XXVIII.

##### THE POISON THAT NEVER FAILS.

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed the weird-looking woman, who confronted Colonel Canter, as he toiled up the steep and narrow path that led to the Knob—a columnar peak that could be seen for miles from almost all directions. It had been prospected without result by various parties, and of late had been let severely alone. The region in its neighborhood had been so little visited that it was not easy to say how the story got abroad that a cave somewhere on the side of the peak was inhabited by a woman whose name was Heba, and who had all the qualities that belong to the race of witches. Certainly Canter had not told, though this was not his first visit.

The mocking laughter in her salutation did not cause him to hesitate now. It was in just that same way she had received him when he first sought her presence; yet he found her then, as he expected to find her now, willing and able to help him.

"Don't laugh so loud, mother," was his salutation. "When one comes to seek your aid he is not generally in that sort of a mood. Try a weep, now, or a howl, and perhaps I might be able to join in the chorus."

"Heba always laughs. Summer or winter,

night or day is the same to her. Life is a joke, and those who think not so must be fit only for the wiser ones to be merry over. And to see the brave Colonel Canter come to the witch who lives at the Knob—who would not laugh? He, and all those cut-throats that move as he crooks his finger, against one stranger in the town, and the stranger is winning all the time. How does he think that Heba can help him, when all the rest have failed?"

"You must have something of the fiend about you to guess why I sought you; or else you keep a closer watch on Hard Pan than is generally known. Yes, there is a stranger in the town who has given me more trouble than mortal man ever did before. Sometimes I half think he must be in league with the other world to get away from every trap with the certainty that he does. The best of men he handles like kittens—and with the same contempt. So far no knife has been able to scar him, or bullet break his skin. When he makes a bet to win it is always as he lays. He tosses stalwart men from his shoulders. When giant powder blows his bed to atoms he steps smiling out of the ruins. What can be done against such a man? He beat Rafelle with the sword, and Silvio with the knife. After that what wile can man work against him? I bring silver and gold; and am waiting to take your advice."

"Why did you not leave him alone till you found out what sort of man he was? Then you would not have to come for Heba's wonderful medicine, that makes the strong man weak, so that the wolves can worry him at their leisure."

"Say, rather, that the vultures can batten on his corpse. The wolves have something else to do. What is the use of mincing words, or pretending to talk in parables? I will venture to say that you know who I am speaking of, and that I am only doing the work of the chief of the Cows, who is strangely careless, or such a man would not have threatened him as this man has done, and then live a day."

"I do know the man. He is the darling of fortune, and I care not to meet him in a war that might slay us both. Yet for gold I will give you what you ask, and you must care for your own safety. No spells of mine can protect thee. There is one on his side who is more powerful still, and who can read the writing of the stars even as I can. She cannot ward off the lightning when it has struck; but she may read of the danger beforehand, and warn him that it is coming. If you fail, blame it not on me, nor even on thyself; but on the daughter of the stars who at times walks very near to him. She has even bewitched Captain Cowl himself. It is because of her that he hath not struck, since he knew of the wager to bring him in before three weeks had passed almost as soon as it was made. He has gone away to be beyond temptation; but he may change his mind again, and turn to rend the stranger."

"And by that time it will be too late to save himself or his friends. He is mad to have trusted this girl with the secrets that may harg more than Captain Cowl."

"And if thou hadst not wasted thy time over this stranger, when he was not yet thy foe, but had met Cowl promptly at the rendezvous, as it had been promised, the girl would have been thy friend instead of thy foe, and the sport from Halcyon would not have been able to gain a footing in the town. It was all thy own fault; and I can tell thee that Cowl was not well-pleased with thee, and is willing to give this man all the rope he wants so long as he turns his guns on thee only. I brought thee to Cowl in the first place, as a man who could give him valued help, and vouched for thy loyalty, so that I care not now to see thee entirely forsaken, when the fortunes of war go against thee, and thou art fighting not only for thyself but for him. For this reason, more than for thy gold, I give thee aid and warning. But even rats desert a sinking ship. If thy fight does not soon look like a winning one it were best for thee to give it up. Thy friends will not hold to thee long."

"Before I do that I will make one solid, open attack myself; but I care not to lose my life till the last minute, or preserve it at the sacrifice of my interest at Hard Pan, until all other means have been tried. Give me the drug, and directions how to use it, so that I may go. I will have been too long away as it is."

"The drug shall be thine, though to but few to use has it ever been intrusted. Follow me to where I work my spells, and it shall be placed in thy hands."

The words of the witch were always well-chosen, and when she spoke in earnest she lost half the peculiarity of appearance that at first sight made her look so uncanny. She was weird, and haggard, all the time, with a wicked glitter in her eyes, but no wits of hers ever went wool-gathering; and if she hinted at enchantments, and other things of that kind, she evidently believed in natural processes, and understood their inner workings.

What she said has shown the reason that Canter sought her in the past—in part at least—and that she was able to give him the present help that he desired. He followed as she led the way back into the cavern, speaking as he went.



"Make no mistake. Arsenic is plenty in Hard Pan, and we know how to spread it on the bread that the dogs eat. This man can use the tools of the sport, but we think there that he is more than that, and that he has not come to Hard Pan without a broader purpose in his mind than the winning of a few dollars. If that was all he had in view he has chosen the best way to defeat his purpose. If he is a detective, come to run down Cowl and his friends, he will not disappear without further inquiry, and it is to those that come after that a straight story must be given. Something not too rapid, and that leaves no trace."

"It is in my hand, and it will work fast or slow according to the dose. But one dose kills—whether it be to-day, or a month from now. A few grains and he lingers a month; what can be held on the point of a knife, and he drops as if shot. Make no mistakes, nor place man nor beast beyond the reach of remedy until thou art sure what thou wouldst do. Seat thyself here while I put together the harmless weeds that joined make the deadly drug."

It was in nature's own laboratory that Colonel Canter found himself—a spot to which he had never before penetrated.

To his surprise he found it fitted up with the paraphernalia of a wizard's studio. Stuffed owls, horned toads, dried and shriveled bats, were scattered around among the retorts, crucibles, and other instruments on shelves and table; while on the curtained wall, in front of a powerful reflector, hung a lamp which gave a light more brilliant than any he had ever seen, making the apartment as light as day. As Heba bent over a mortar on the table, and poured into it a few spoonfuls of powder from the two flasks that she had taken from the shelf that was now behind her, the draping curtains around the table moved slightly, and from behind them came a long, sleepy yawn that Canter recognized as belonging to a wild animal of the cat kind. More was he astonished when the curtain was raised, and the head of an enormous mountain lion protruded.

Sleepily the two fiery eyes sought for his, and when they had found them rested there with a watchful stare that told him to be careful what he did, and perhaps of what he said.

Had the colonel been alone with the animal he might have feared it less. His revolver was handy, and man against beast he would not doubt the issue. But perhaps, if this woman chose she could launch the animal on him by a nod, and follow up the attack herself. If by any chance she was a friend of the other enchantress—why had he not thought of that before—she might do it, and take the gold he had brought her without hazarding the lives he was so desperately bent on reaching.

Nothing of the kind did he show in his tone.

"Have done with all this mummery. Of what good can it be with me?"

"Thou art the smallest part of my concern. These things must be compounded as the stars direct, and a failure of the least thing would give thee nothing but a clumsy weapon, that would be death to all the world save the one it was intended to strike. There are charms to be met with other charms. Beware how thou makest a mock of them. The workman may be driven to slay himself with his own tools. Heba speaks of what she knows, and nothing else."

"Compound it according to all the laws and spells in such cases known and provided; but finish it quickly."

"Thy patience is none of the greatest, and I have no sore trial for it. Here is the drug, as thou hast asked for it. In that flask thou hast the lives of over a dozen men—beware that thine own be not among the number."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### MORE POTENT THAN THE POISON.

By the starlight Harry was gazing across at the dark outlines of the shanty at the mouth of the Golden Stream. At that hour of the night it was not the safest of places for him had his presence been known by the men who were guarding that rather mysterious property. Yet, he had exercised no caution as he strolled along to the spot he now occupied; and he stood there with his arms folded and so deeply engaged in thought that it seemed hardly likely he would notice one who might approach silently from behind.

It was hard to tell whether he had taken notice, or whether it was the natural coolness of the man that enabled him to turn his head so quietly as a human figure, without noise or notice appeared at his side.

"The daughter of the stars will be apt to go home some evening to hunt her father, if she keeps stepping around dangerous people without giving due warning. It is not everybody that can see who you are in the dark."

"Poncho Poncho is not afraid to trust to the eyesight of the man last from Halcyon. And hereabouts it might not be safe to breathe his name aloud. Words have wings, and if they flew to the men that are lurking over yonder their courage might stiffen so that they would

be willing to try a chance shot at the man they are all afraid to face openly. And it is the chance shot only that can kill a man like thee."

"There's a heap in that; but then, don't you see, if I could stir them up to something in that style, when I was going peacefully along the trail, saying nothing to any one, it would give me the chance of the season to charge their works. While I was getting even, according to all the rules of law and order, I could see what lay beyond there. I confess that I have my curiosity to know."

"Surely, thou art not thinking of jumping the Golden Stream? Even thou, with a hundred men at thy back, could not hold it. The camp would rise right at thee. If there were not the men to oust thee here they would draw on all the camps in the Territory. Truly, I sometimes wonder whether thy braggadocio be not greater than thy courage."

"Never a jump. I have a better thing in the air than ever the Golden Stream will prove; and if all the signs don't fail it will not be long before we will be down to the mother lode, and turning the ore out by the car-load. But I have an idea that there is something in the Golden Stream besides wealth—haven't you?"

He turned on her quickly, as he spoke; not to see her face, but to mark if her features betrayed any sudden start at his question.

She was calm and unmoved as she answered:

"Thy guess may be a good one; or thou hast reasoned it out well. To me, too, has it come—perhaps it was the stars that spoke—that there is something hidden there it would damage the manager much to find. I would have told thee all in due time, but the whole truth is slow to come, and the hour to prove the suspicion is not yet at hand. And there is something that concerns thee more deeply than the finding of Walter Forbes. Dost know what happened to-day?"

"Many things—chiefly that Canter went out to interview old Heba, the Witch of the Knob. If he can't down a man any other way he is willing to have her help."

"And canst thou speak so calmly of it, knowing that there is death in her drugs?"

"They won't hurt if I don't take 'em; and as long as my medicine is as good as hers I'm not much afraid of her hoodoo. Perhaps, if you were to work on my side, we could swamp the old lady herself."

"Speak not lightly of the danger. Thou canst not be always on thy guard, and the drug can be given thee at the time when foul play is least suspected, and perhaps come from the hand of thy best friend. Now that he has undertaken to do the thing himself, Canter will be cool and in no haste, such as might betray him. If thou art not protected thou wilt fall—and I will protect thee."

"Thanks. There could be other things happening that would not be as pleasant; though I don't see how you are going to ward off harm that I could not manage myself. I will always be on the ground, you know; and you will not."

"But my help will always be with thee, even if I am not. It was for this that I came. To the poisons of Heba there is an antidote, that can make them harmless as milk, and I bring it to thee that thou mayest always be on thy guard. Take a trifle daily, on rising, so that any dose that Canter may give thee will work thee no great harm, even if the antidote were not again used; but if thou hast reason to suspect that he has drugged thee, take freely a spoonful at the time, and I promise thee that no evil can come to thee, from it. If I thought that it would aid thee I would offer thee of the poison of Heba; but thou art not a man to deal in such items, and there is the chance that it might some day be found upon thee, to thy damage. Such luck as thine cannot last forever."

"Correct you are. As long as cartridges don't fail I have little use for philters. If I hadn't an idea of settling quietly down, and working Hard Pan on the square for all it is worth, to a model, law-abiding citizen, I don't know that I would care to bother with an antidote. If you cut the dog's tail off just behind the ears, he won't suck eggs; and that is the way I ought to cure Canter. But under the circumstances I am willing to be your debtor, and I will promise to take your drug till I see something better."

"It is the most wisdom one has heard from thy lips since thou entered Hard Pan. Here is the flask. Preserve it carefully, since I may not be near to give thee another."

"And now, what further can you tell me about that unfortunate young man, who seems to have thought he could bluff the colonel without four aces in his hand, and the cullings of the pack up his sleeve? He may be dead, you know, and there's no great glory in finding a corpse."

"He will not die if the colonel can help it—not for the present at least. Whether he is really hidden in the mine I know not as yet, and cannot now find out. But in a day or so I may tell thee. Then, if it is so desired, I think I can lead thee past the guards, and to where he is confined—if he be there at all. There will

be danger in it until he is fairly in thy hands. After that thou hast a reason why thou canst protect thyself, even to the bringing in of that army of thine that is within such fair supporting distance."

"All right. Promise me that, and I will look after my own affairs, and trust to you to follow my game. I am for Hard Pan now, but if there is anything I can be of service to you in, do not hesitate to speak. I owe you much, and Hurrah Harry was never an ungrateful debtor."

"Nothing. Good-night!"

The sober, reflective mood was one that fell but seldom on the sport, but it came over him mightily as he pursued his lonely and unmolested way to Hard Pan.

Poncho Poncho—if that very ugly name belonged in any true sense to the woman who had just parted from him—was getting to be something more than a beautiful mystery.

Her acquaintance with poisons was no particular recommendation to Harry, well though it might serve his purpose at this critical moment. If he was not greatly mistaken in the woman, she would be as willing to slay as to save if her anger was turned against him; and how soon that might happen could not be foretold.

The apparent willingness to help him in the discovery of Walter Forbes was a hint that was not wasted. If he had not shown that he had no serious interest in Miss Bartram, the daughter of the stars would doubtless have been just as willing to have worked her harm.

"She may be a daughter of the Witch of the Knob, for all I know—and in fact I shouldn't wonder if she was. That is the best way to account for the amount of knowledge she has about various hidden things. If ever I skip this camp in a hurry, it is two to one that she has something to do with my going. I can stay and fight men till the last horn blows, but confound it if I know how to deal with a woman. If she really has a liking for the undersigned, all I have to say is that I wish she had placed her affections somewhere else. All that can come of it will be vanity and vexation of spirit. She is not my style at all!"

Yet he did not forget the antidote she had given him; or doubt its efficacy. He intended to take his regular dose, and like Mithridates, arm himself beforehand against the poison that the colonel had procured from Heba. Until he knew with certainty the full list of the men who trained under the colonel, he could not know where he need not look for treachery. He was not at all certain that the men at the mine who were working under Lum, would not rise upon him at the first sign of ore, and in the town there were but two men, Jem Hudson and Pedro Mercator, whom he felt he could trust were his hands tied. And Pedro would be perfectly willing to allow him to fight his own battles.

He thought over all these things as he swung along the trail, but they really gave him less trouble than one would suspect, and by the time that he had entered the straggling camp, he was himself again, and no one else.

In town something unexpected had developed, and he knew by intuition, and without a moment's hesitation, that it might have an important bearing on him and his affairs. As he drew near the Giraffe, he heard the sound of horses' feet and the jingle of military accouterments, nearing the town by the river road.

Others heard the noise, and when he stepped upon the porch, Hudson and two or three more were listening.

The noise stopped for a moment, as the party came to a halt. Then one or two horsemen separated from the main body, and came galloping up to the Giraffe.

"Privates to the ground, and officers to the Giraffe!" laughed Harry. "That's the way it goes in this world. What under the sun does the outfit want here?"

## CHAPTER XXX.

### ONLY A SQUADRON OF CAVALRY—CAPTAIN COWL IN TOWN.

THE question in regard to the outfit was one that was asked by more than Hurrah Harry, both that night and during the next few days. The answer came in the shape of conjecture entirely, so far as the general public was concerned. There were various rumors set on foot even before Major Brake, attended by a young lieutenant, rode up to the porch of the Giraffe and announced that he intended to make that house his headquarters for a few days.

Hurrah Harry was smoking a cigar on the porch when the officer arrived, and took his measure from his manner.

"Not the worst man in the world, but given to one idea at a time. An honest martinet, I should judge, who is going to deal justly with all the world; but makes it mighty unpleasant for those who want to, or have to, deal with him. Bet a dollar he is down here on the chase of Captain Cowl. Canter could hardly have had influence enough to have him sent here so that I would lose that bet with Mike? Really, I will have to be looking around, or they may cut in ahead of me. The money is small pota-



toes, but it would be a bit at my prestige, that I fancy Canter would not object making, if he could do it safely."

It seemed strange, that while Harry was thinking thus, and listening listlessly to the conversation between the still mounted major and Hudson, that the former should finish by asking:

"And by the way, sir, is there not a gentleman in the town who was formerly connected with the army—Canter is his name, Chester Canter? We were in the same regiment, and I wish to hunt him up."

"Right I was, for a dollar—unless Canter has brought him here to hunt me. On the strength of that suggestion I'll go to bed, and make the major's acquaintance some other time. There will be some funny complications now, or I am greatly mistaken."

Yet, in spite of this seeming confirmation, Harry was as near wrong as right.

Colonel Canter knew nothing beforehand of this invasion, and was by no means pleased when he heard of it. Major Brake was not the kind of man that he cared to have nosing around Hard Pan, even though he might be able to make use of him to further his own ends. When Chet Delain found the colonel to tell him the news there was a dead dog lying in front of him on the floor, at which he was thoughtfully looking.

"Found Heba's medicine reliable, eh?" said Chet, with a glance at the defunct canine. "I wouldn't leave many traces of the experiment, though. We are in for something that we didn't count on, and if I'm not 'way off, the eyes I got a glimpse of to-night can see as far into a millstone as those of the next man. Did you ever meet Major Brake when you were in the Regular Army?"

"Major Dan Brake? Of course I have met him. We served in the same regiment. You don't mean to say he is in town?"

"That's what the gentleman calls himself who has camped at the Giraffe, and who is asking for you; but I don't always take on trust everything that I hear. I suppose that you are ready to throw yourself into his arms. If he keeps up the hurry he began with he will be around here in a few moments looking for you, so you may as well have your story ready for him when he arrives."

The colonel swore softly. In general he was not a profane man; but when the proper subject was presented he could do justice to it, and then not get excited.

"The major is bad enough," added Delain, "but the squadron of cavalry that is with him adds to the disagreeable nature of the visit. Can't you go down and send him away?"

"Quit your nonsense, can't you? I hope that he will not get on my trail to-night. I have work to do before I am ready to meet him. And his eyes, as you hint, will be sharp enough to see if I do not meet him just as I used to a dozen years ago."

"If you can keep out of his sight there will be no great search made for you. I had presence of mind enough to start the report that you were out at the Golden Stream, waiting for an attack that you expected from a party of jumpers. After I had done it I was afraid that half the town would go out to see the fight; but as the Halcyon man is safe in his hole they may think that it is a false alarm."

"And I suppose that he is bound to meet Bartram?"

"If he stays here I should suppose that he is; but I can't see that it will make much difference. Jason is a man of slender knowledge, and outside of legitimate business, pretty much of a fool. What he learns from the Hard Pan magnate will hardly do much harm to any one but himself."

"Which shows how much a smart man like Chet Delain may be mistaken. As Bartram's previous acquaintance with the major was under another name, the circumstances of the case will be apt to cause some investigation. And the less of that, the better for you and me. Eh, Chet?"

"I don't remember anything fresh that they can find out about me—which shows the advantage of having a bad record. Of course it will be inconvenient for the head man of the Golden Stream to be found mixed up with a lot of old pards, and new ones, who are a good deal worse than merely off color. Of that you will have to take your chances. Meantime, as I supposed that you would have your time pretty fully taken up with your old friend for the next few days, I thought I had better see you and find out if there were any particular orders. What you can't attend to perhaps the rest of us can."

"I can think of nothing for the present."

"And the sport?"

"Let him alone. I must find out from Brake whether he is one of his men. Some of these regular officers can come as near striking the gait that he goes as any one living, and perhaps he's not a devil, after all. He may be some young captain, trying his hand on a bit of amateur detective work."

"And if so, we have a bad case on our hands. Won't do to have him disappear too suddenly, now. May have got in a preliminary report,

that brought the troops down to finish the work."

"That is one view of the case. Then there is another. If he is not a detective, what is the matter with his being Captain Cowl himself? There is something of a reward for running the outlaw down, and I would just as soon take it and see this gentleman swing as not."

"And so you think that our friend from Halcyon cannot fight a squadron of cavalry? Perhaps you are right; but I wouldn't bet too high, even on that. It would be like him to throw the hounds off just where they could blunder on another scent. He's mighty bad medicine to fool with, and I expect we will have to kill him yet. But that is your say-so. I can jump the camp if it looks too hot, and go on to another place. That's the advantage I hold in not being too prosperous."

Until Canter had seen his old-time military comrade not much could be arranged for the future, and Delain went out presently, in search of further information.

He obtained but little. The troops were encamped at the river, and the major with his orderly was at the Giraffe. The object of their presence was only conjecture.

Harry had wisely thought that not much information would be developed by his remaining on the ground. If the troops were merely on the march he had no interest in them, and they might disappear and welcome while he slept. If they were going to remain, Hudson might have a budget of news by the following morning. Anyhow, what Jem would not know it was not likely that any one else would find out.

His slumbers were not disturbed, and when he arose the bugles down at the river were just blowing the reveille.

The early hours of the morning passed without adding much to the stock of information in regard to the reasons for the presence of the troops, though Jem said that he suspected that they were on the trail of the outlaws who had been haunting that region. Of his own knowledge Harry was able to say that Colonel Canter had called, and been received by the major, with whom a long conference had been held.

Finally, as there was nothing new from Lum, Harry started out for his morning stroll around town.

Chance brought him in the neighborhood of Pedro Mercator's, and the banker himself called him in.

"If thou art not in too great a hurry, there is a gentleman here who wishes to see thee, and was but this moment asking after thee. I might caution thee beforehand to say nothing of having met him at my place, since he will be apt to forget that it is not a bit of information that any of us would care to hear repeated."

Pedro led the way to his private room, with which by this time Harry had become pretty well acquainted.

"Happy to meet you, pard. How does the good work go? I suppose you remember me?"

As he spoke the gentleman rose to his feet, and threw back the cloak that partially concealed his figure. At a glance Harry recognized the smaller of the two horsemen he had met, when he was on the way to Hard Pan.

"I remember you well enough, though I can't say that I ever heard your name. At least, you did not hand out your card along with the thousand that you gave me to begin operations with at Hard Pan. Glad am I to see you, though you come a little too soon to have much of a dividend on profits to date. Pedro can tell how the bank account has stood, and I will be glad to draw you a check for half the amount. I have an investment that has not begun to pay, but it is sure to pan out big, and by the end of the three weeks I asked for there may be something worth your while in the partnership account. As far as sport goes there is not much to look for here. These people haven't the sand of a mouse. They barred me out of every game in the camp before I had fairly got to going."

"I have heard of you," laughed the man, as Harry vented his indignation against the cowardice of the Hard Panners. "You have been doing very well for your opportunities. And as for the account—let it run. I have no present need of money, as Pedro can assure you, and would prefer to leave it with you until it is worth the drawing."

"Just as you please, and yet, if you will give me a name I would sooner draw the check, and have that much off my mind. Or at least taken thousand on account. There is no telling what may happen to me, and I don't want a thoroughbred like you to suffer for his confidence in human nature."

"They have been crowding you pretty hard, and that is a fact; but I am not afraid they can down you as long as this streak of luck holds on. What is this troop of soldiers after? Have they come for you—or me?"

Harry looked up in amazement as he caught the latter part of the question. Mercator looked also—and as though he was a little anxious.

"What matter if he knows the truth?" asked the man, recklessly. "I understand that he is to add to the wealth of the firm by bringing me in, but now that I am here he is not likely to

interfere with me. As yet I have not given my name, and I will admit that in polite society I would sooner be known as Frank Foster, but between ourselves why should you not know me as what I am—Captain Cowl?"

#### CHAPTER XXXI.

##### WHAT THE MAJOR WAS REALLY AFTER.

It has been mentioned that Colonel Canter made rather an early call on the major, and was admitted to an interview. It may be as well to explain to the reader what passed between the two, as there was in reality no particular mystery about the presence of Major Brake and the squadron of cavalry at Hard Pan.

There could be no doubt about the two having met before, after seeing the cordiality of their meeting.

"Gad, it's Canter, sure enough. When I got a hint to visit this out-of-the-way place, I said to myself that if it was true our old commissary was down there, as I had heard, the trip would not be a wild-goose-chase altogether, if I could hunt him up."

"And you need not ask if I am glad to see you. It seems like a streak of sunshine right out of the good old times. So you are a major now. If one holds on long enough merit will tell."

"Or the fellow get a step that is next on the roll. It was time. Don't wonder that you got out, after being a colonel of volunteers. To come back and wear bars after sporting a leaf—since I know the difference—would be more than I could stand, and I wonder you had the courage to try it. But you are looking well—not a day older than when I saw you the last time; and I hear that the world has been using you well."

"I can't complain, as far as present prospects go; but there have been times when I wished that I was once more safely anchored on the breast of Uncle Sam. But do you know that your appearance here was more than a surprise? Until I saw your face I was not sure that there was not somehow a mistake."

"Perhaps I could guess the reason why; but I will leave it for you to tell."

"Yes, I have no doubt you could tell, though I have something to add that may give even your nerves a shaking. Until this morning I believed that you were dead."

"Murdered, I suppose you have it on your lips to say. That was the report in the papers, for we kept up the delusion for a few days, and in this out of the way region you might see the account that went over the land in the biggest kind of display type, without ever chancing on the correction, that the press at large was not so anxious to print."

"In just that way it happened. I saw the account of the affair just before I started for Sonora, and by the time I got back it was all forgotten. There is another man in the same boat with myself so far as his knowledge is concerned, who will no doubt feel even stranger than I did when he hears the revelation."

"You mean?"

"Edwin Beachcroft, of course."

"Curse him! The rascal has so completely vanished that I begin to believe that he is dead."

"Not very dead, since I have spoken with him within the last forty-eight hours. He is living in Hard Pan; has thriven as the unrighteous generally do when their crimes do not find them out; is one of our magnates; and his name as it is here known in Jason Bartram."

"Canter, your news is worth a year's pay. I would travel a thousand miles to meet him. I suppose there is no way in which he can be adequately punished, but it will do me good to tax him with the crime that he attempted, and tell him what I think of him."

"I can understand the feeling precisely. And yet, the poor devil has had his own punishment. He has been living under fear of the law ever since. Of course I recognized him, and charged him with the crime, but he begged off so that I had no heart to go any further. He claimed that he acted honestly enough all through, and that he never understood it, but was too much broken up to stay and face the music. When you dawn on him it will be a terrible shock. I am not altogether sure it will not be a fatal one."

"It ought to be. The villain! Not content with robbing me over the card-table, he tried to take my life by a trick, the like of which was never known before on the field of honor. He had me given a weapon that contained no bullet, and then sent his own ball straight for my heart."

"He claims that it was all intended for a joke, and that there was no bullet to be placed in either pistol. He could not at first believe it when he saw you fall."

"He will have a chance to explain all that when we meet. The villain deliberately slipped a ball in his pistol, knowing that mine contained none. There was proof to hand of that much, and if I had died, as at first it was reported that I had done, he would have hung as high as Haman."

"Oh, of course I know nothing more than the



newspaper accounts I read at the time, and what he has told me since. I give you what I have heard from him for what it is worth—and that don't seem to be much. Only, for the sake of his daughter, I hope you will be as lenient as you can."

"He has a daughter, has he?"

"Yes; a young lady of beauty and spirit, in whom I confess I have taken more than a passing interest. If you see her, you will not wonder at the fact."

"I tell you, Canter, I can't forgive him, daughter or no daughter; but of course there is nothing I can do except speak my mind. I am not an assassin, though according to your western code I am not sure but what I would be justified in shooting him down on sight. I can't call him out, as any man who appeared on the field with him would be disgraced. And I wouldn't dirty my hands horsewhipping him."

"Well, it does seem a lame and impotent revenge; but he will feel it all the same. That, I understand, was not the object of your visit to this place, so that you will have just so much extra satisfaction, without, as the boys say, it costing you a cent."

"Yes, that is true. As for the real object of my presence here, it is a sort of open secret, that can be shared with a few. And I count on your help in bringing it to a successful termination. I am sent down to look after a bandit who has been doing some desperate work in these regions. He has assumed the name of Captain Cowl, but it is more than suspected that he is a Mexican, and that the authorities of his native land, so far as there are any in that Heaven-forsaken country, would like very much to catch him on the other side of the border. If we can get him, we will take him, but if we can't we will be satisfied to drive him over to the arms of the men who are waiting to square some old accounts. It is a sort of international courtesy that we are after, and with a little good luck in spotting the game we hope for success in the grand *chasse*. Do you think that anything can be found out in Hard Pan as to the haunts of the man?"

The colonel looked up thoughtfully. For a moment or so he did not answer. He was really revolving an important question in his mind.

"Was this question of the major's in perfect good faith?"

If it was, he might offer the suggestion that was on his lips. He hesitated, however.

"One question first. Have you sent any one ahead to spy out the land? Have you had a man on the ground for the last few days?"

"Your knowledge of how the army works should tell you how that is. Of course not. They send down an order to go and do such a thing, and we go and do it. Something like you suggest should have been done, but there was no time for it. I know it is like ordering a man to find a needle in a haystack; but there is nothing to do but trust to army rules and regulations, and gallop ahead. Now, I suppose you had an idea in asking the question—what is it? Is there some one here already, on the same errand?"

"Not that; but it is possible that the man himself is where your hands can be laid upon him. At least, a man has lately struck the camp who has turned out to be a sort of human cyclone, such as Cowl is supposed to be, and some of the inhabitants have been connecting him with the outlaws. Of course this is only conjecture, but I think myself that he would bear watching. He may be in communication with Cowl, if he is not that gentleman himself."

The major had some questions to ask on hearing this, and Canter gave a brief sketch of the operations of the sport since his arrival.

The story as told seemed to strike the major, who at once said that he would give orders to have the man put under surveillance. And before Harry was out of the Giraffe for his morning stroll the duty had been attended to.

"Don't make any mistakes, Brake. The man is the most reckless of desperadoes, but he may not be a road-agent. If it should turn out that he is the veritable Captain Cowl, and he is satisfied that his identity has been positively determined, you may make up your mind that you will never capture him alive. He will die trying to make his teeth meet."

"Better that way, perhaps. There is a savage bravery about him that somehow calls for that sort of an end, rather than the rope. And now, as soon as I have written a few orders, I want to trespass on your time a little further, if it can be done without too much sacrifice on your part. I want to take you along as a witness to the interview between myself and Beachcroft. I swear I don't want to meet the villain alone. My temper gets away with me sometimes, and I would not have his blood on my hands."

"Nor would I like to see yours on his, and that would be more likely. You can command me. I made my arrangements for the day, and if our outlaw friend does not attempt to jump the Golden Stream I know of nothing that will be likely to call me away."

#### CHAPTER XXXII.

##### JASON BARTRAM GETS A SHOCK.

"SEE here," said Harry, when he had time to fairly digest the information. You have al-

lowed me to get myself in the worst box of the season. Why didn't you give me a wink along with the thousand? I have money up on bringing you in, and I always win when I bet. But if I had known what I was contracting to do I would sooner have cut off my right hand than been led into anything of the kind. I can't back out, for a dozen reasons; and I wouldn't be white if I jumped the man who gave me a starter when he saw me down on my luck. You know just how it is, I see; so tell me what I am to do."

No one had heard the sport speak with more earnestness since he came to Hard Pan. And he turned away as though he did not care to look more closely at the person of the outlaw.

"Don't worry about it. If I had not known that you were bent on doing only what is the square thing I should never have told you who I was. I am putting not only myself but Mercator as much in your power as we can be in the power of any man. All you have to do is to play your hand out, just as you intended to. Of course, as I am already in the town, you have nothing to do with me now. So, we work around to my original question. What are the bold soldier boys after in Hard Pan?"

"Have it to suit yourself. Perhaps I can see my way out of the snap before the time comes to say *keno*. For the soldiers I can say nothing. Major Brake has so far kept his own counsel—unless he has revealed it to Colonel Canter. As the colonel and I are not on speaking terms I cannot say anything about what he knows. Perhaps if you were to see him he might tell you."

"But why should he confide in Canter? That gentleman has enough to do managing his own affairs, without turning deputy-marshal."

"Oh, they are old army acquaintances, from what Brake said when he arrived. I guess they will take a smoke and a dozen drinks together, for the sake of old times, and that will be all there will come of it."

"Perhaps I have confidence enough in you to believe that if you knew or thought more that you would tell me. Should you learn anything of importance you can tell Mercator, and he will find some means of getting word to me. I must be going now. There are several other persons that I wish to see in Hard Pan, and I do not care to remain too long in the place. If at any time I can give you any real help, without compromising you, let me know. I or my men will be on hand as you may wish."

Without offering to shake hands, and with no more formal parting than this, Captain Cowl drew his cloak around him once more, and stalked out of the door. He looked like a prosperous Mexican ranchero, who had been settling his bank affairs; and as others like to him were no unusual sight on the streets of Hard Pan, he was allowed to go his way unquestioned.

"You may talk of nerve," said Harry, as the outlaw passed finally from view; "but his takes the cake. If Brake really is after him there may be trouble yet before he gets out of town."

"Why should there be?" asked Mercator, as though the appearance of Cowl was no such wonderful bit of temerity. "There is no one, down to the men he has robbed, can recognize him in that garb, and the stranger in our town is not yet arrested on suspicion. Keep good watch over thine own goings and comings, for thou art in much more danger thyself."

"I believe you, my boy. Being an honest man, life in Hard Pan is attended with numerous dangers, the full catalogue of which I am constructing. I will go out myself, and see if I can find anything new to add to the list."

A moment more and Harry would have been gone, but while his foot was yet raised for the step there was a new arrival, and— Well, the sport did not care to do anything that might look like running away. He stood his ground, though the gentleman that entered was Jason Bartram.

Harry knew the man well enough by sight, though the two had never met under circumstances where an acquaintance would be likely to follow.

There was not much cordiality about their meeting now. Mercator, on his own responsibility, performed a sort of introduction, which was but coldly acknowledged. Hurrah Harry sunk back into the seat he was vacating, and Jason turned to the banker.

He had come in on business, and his conversation for a time was in a low tone. Harry lounged in his seat, without any particular purpose. After a while Bartram's voice raised a little, as he finished the business part of the interview, and asked carelessly:

"I understand that we have some military visitors; do you know who is in command of the detachment? At one time I had quite an acquaintance in the army."

"Very little have I heard in regard to the soldiers, since their presence here concerns me not. A name was mentioned in my hearing; but, really, I have forgotten it. Perhaps Mr. Harry, there, may remember."

"So I should suppose," coolly responded the High Horse, for it was not his purpose to put on

any frills in the presence of Jason Bartram. "I heard it mentioned, and took a good look at it afterward, in the register, and I am not one of the forgetful kind."

"And it was, what?" asked Pedro, who took no notion of the rather disrespectful manner of the sport.

"Brake. Major Daniel Brake."

"Good Heavens!"

Bartram sprang to his feet at the mention of the name, and while the exclamation fell hoarsely from his lips he stared wildly at the speaker. His face had grown suddenly white, his hands quivered as he held them to his temples, the fingers thrust into his hair, and his whole aspect was that of a man who had just received a terrible shock.

A glass of water for Mr. Bartram, if you please, Mercator. He has been taken suddenly sick."

"It is false! I am not sick! It is a blow that you have struck—whether in malice or good faith I know not as yet. Is this the truth that you have just spoken? Is the name of that man really Daniel Brake?"

"I only vouch for what the books of the Giraffe will show. If the gentleman is lying perhaps Colonel Canter might convict him. The two were closeted together this morning."

Without another word Jason dropped into his chair, and though he had not fainted, for a brief season he looked more like one dead than alive.

"Bless my soul, it looks as though the major might be after *him*," thought Harry, as he saw the thrilling effect that his revelation had produced. "There is something wrong about the man, for my organs of pity don't thrill worth a cent."

The prostration did not last long. When Bartram raised his head again he was something like himself.

"Pardon me for what must have seemed a very childish display of feeling. The news came upon me so unexpectedly, and found me so unprepared. I have for years supposed that Major Brake was dead. I do not doubt the statements of the gentleman, and beg his pardon if I have offended. I must see Brake at once, yet hardly seem to have the strength. Would you mind assisting me through the interview. If I have your word I know that you will not fail me, and somehow I feel as though I would need some one strong to lean upon."

The proposition was the last one that the sport expected to receive, and yet he did not hesitate with the answer.

"I am always willing to go where I can do the most good. I don't mind supporting your tottering footsteps as you go into the presence of the great panjandram, but I give you fair notice that, while I don't allow a gentleman under my canopy to be imposed on, if you pick a fight with this martinet I will allow you to do all the shooting. I am not an assassin."

"It is all I ask. Some one whose nerves will stiffen my own until what I know will be a trying interview is over. Come. There must be no delay. Not a minute."

The gentleman seemed feverishly anxious to be gone and Harry had no reason for delay. To the surprise of Pedro the two left the bank together. As they stepped into the street Harry noticed that there was a man in uniform lounging near whose eyes brightened as he made his appearance, and who followed them after a little. Another man might not have noticed it, but Harry had been followed before.

"I think that I saw that gentleman when I set out on my travels, and it is a little singular that he should have taken his rest just there. I suppose I will have something to say to the major myself."

At the Giraffe they found that the major had but lately gone out; and Hudson whispered to his favored guest that he thought that Brake had gone direct to Bartram's house.

Harry explained as much to Bartram, who shivered as he heard it, but expressed no surprise.

"Let us go there, then. When I heard the name I knew that he would not delay in hunting me out. I wanted to meet him more than half-way. No doubt he will wait—perhaps he has sent word to the office."

Of course there were plenty of persons to see Hurrah Harry on the street with one of the magnates of Hard Pan, and the unanimous verdict was that it meant something. To this there might perhaps be counted one exception—a dismounted cavalryman, who lounged along in the rear without any other idea being suggested to his mind than that he was keeping an eye on the High Horse from Halcyon.

When Miss Fanny met them at the door she expressed none of the surprise that she certainly felt, but simply stated that there were two visitors for Mr. Bartram—Colonel Canter, and a military gentleman.

Harry would have shrugged his shoulders at the mention of the colonel's name if he had been in the habit of manifesting his feeling by any outward sign. He felt like it.

But he only nodded to Fanny, with a smile, and entered to see Brake surveying them with a cold sneer.



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## THE VICTIM OF A PLOT.

Now that he was in the presence of the major, Bartram became as calm as he could wish. Too calm, perhaps; for the words that he had thought himself so anxious to utter were no longer at his lips. He simply stared steadily into those chilling eyes, holding his hand as though he had half-intended to extend it, and had not yet fully decided what to do with it.

"Well, you cowardly dog, what have you got to say for yourself?"

The major spoke slowly and without a trace of passion in his tone. But he crowded up into his words about all the cutting contempt that could be well got into the space.

Yet his question, roughly worded as it was, was the very one that Bartram was able to answer to.

"Florence Bindly was my wife."

"Good heavens, man! I cannot believe it."

"I have her marriage certificate, and our daughter—her living image—in the house."

"And that was why you sought to slay me—on account of what I had said the night before to Florence—to your wife?"

"I never sought to slay you at all; and not for that most certainly, since I did not know it then. Curse all secret marriages! Wilson overheard what you said, and he would have given his soul just then for Florence Bindly. I was ashamed of that little affair over the card-table, and would have drawn out if I could. Wilson kept the thing going, and said it would be such a joke, and that after it was all over it should be explained, and if your courage stood the test you would not be sorry that it had been tried. I was a fool to consent, and if I had the wisdom in those days that I have accumulated since I never would have done it. I knew that Wilson's heart was set on Florence, but I never dreamed that he would take such foul means to get us both out of the way. He ruined me, and yet I think that he failed in his intentions as completely as man well could, since he never saw Florence again."

"And she was living when the world thought that she had drowned herself over the unfortunate affair."

"Living for years after. She never knew the whole miserable truth, and blamed herself with what had happened. It was through her, and when she was in the depth of her sorrow over the wrecking of two lives, that I heard of the interview of the night before our unfortunate affair. She had not blamed you, that you had lost your temper; since she acknowledged that she had treated you badly. In time she communicated with her father; but though he kept silent, he never forgave her; and did not apprise her of the fact that you were living. Perhaps he thought that we knew it."

The major's face had undergone a great alteration. He had heard one thing at least that gave him more than a surprise, and he wanted time to consider before he spoke again. Then, when he thought of all that this man had probably suffered and of what the woman he once fancied he loved had endured, there was a change in his feelings as complete as it was remarkable.

It was not the harm to himself that had made him so vindictive, after all, and now when he found that the woman who he thought had been compromised in the affray, and subsequent duel, and had taken her life in her despair, had been the wife, comforter and companion of this man all the time, there was a certain sense of relief about the knowledge that struck him as being too odd not to mean something. After a little he spoke slowly, and in a changed voice.

"See here, Beachcroft, I begin to feel that you may have been as much sinned against as sinning; and that perhaps all the grounds of complaint are not on my side. For one thing, I cannot forgive myself for having allowed Wilson to take me in. I knew that he was a rascal, even while he was admitted to our circle, and when he showed himself in his true colors to all the world, some months after our affair, I own that I had a vague suspicion that perhaps he knew more than he told at the time."

"But the idea that he put that bullet in the pistol without your knowledge, never occurred to me. He had it just the other way, and we took his story, backed as it was by the others, and thought no further. How you managed to hide yourself so completely is a mystery. Perhaps it is just as well you succeeded. Passion was high, then; and it might not have been as easy to give the intelligible explanation that we can now understand, listening to it in cold blood. So your daughter is the image of Florence. Really, I would like to see her."

Beachcroft was cool enough now. He saw that his story was believed, and that made a new man of him. He was no longer, to a certain extent, in the power of Colonel Canter; and if the truth had been known, was already considering how he would soon be doing his best to close accounts with that gentleman.

"At the time, if left to myself, it is possible that I would have remained to face it out. But I was in Wilson's hands, and he arranged everything. You can understand, knowing him as you did, that even if I had cleared myself in re-

gard to the duel with you, I would still have had a settlement to make with Florence's father, and I am not sure but that both she and I dreaded that worst of all.

"And now, Brake, you say that you would like to meet the daughter of Florence Bindly. If you believe me, as I am sure that you do, what is there really between us? An awkwardness at present, I admit; but that will soon wear off. There are plenty of things that it will do us no good to talk over, and you can make me feel the forgiveness that your eyes have been speaking of for the last few moments, by meeting her at my table. I cannot promise you anything sumptuous, but you will still fare as well as at the Giraffe."

"Done!" exclaimed the major, yielding with unexpected readiness to the invitation. "Somebody says that the worst use you can put a man to is to kill him, and I guess it's the truth. Let by-gones be by-gones. Here's my hand. We were very warm friends once, and though that sort of nonsense is over forever, we can still be very good acquaintances. The rest may depend on your larder."

Then the two men shook hands, much to the seeming delight of Colonel Canter, who had all the time remained silent.

He now stepped forward, and shook both men warmly by the hand.

"And this gentleman, Major Brake, is Mr. Harry, who rendered my daughter a very great service a few evenings ago. He saved her life at the risk of his own, when she had fallen into the river. For a stranger to take a leap off of the bridge—probably you have noticed how it looks—and run the chances of being dashed to pieces on the rocks below, was a gallant thing, and I have not as yet thanked him properly for it. He is here at my invitation, for I confess that when I heard that you were alive and here, I was so far overcome that I was afraid that I could not reach you unaided. I was determined that not a moment should be lost, and he kindly consented to stay with me."

Brake eyed the sport a little closely as he took his hand. The name seemed familiar, yet he was not certain that he had ever heard it before. Certainly he did not remember the handsome-faced man, who acknowledged the introduction with such easy grace.

"Mr. Bartram makes too much of a simple little thing. It was because I was a stranger that I did not know the danger; and it was only an act done for womankind in general, since I had no idea who was in the swim, and had never seen Miss Bartram before."

"Mr. Harry takes chances of all kinds," major, said Canter, in an even way, that hardly seemed intended to give offense.

"I assisted him to the extent of several thousand dollars the same evening; and from the luck that he always seems to have I am not surprised that he is willing to take chances."

"And I don't see that it makes him any the worse fellow," retorted Bartram, who was feeling too elated not to take the part of any one. For that matter, it would be hard to find a man in the town who does not occasionally sacrifice to the blind goddess, and who would not stand pat on four queens!"

"That is a fact," said the major. "We all have our liking for a little quiet draw, and I am not sure that we are much the worse for it in the long run. As I forswore such vanity, in an hour of vexation, and have since kept to my resolution with a certain amount of difficulty, I am inclined to look upon the game with a good deal of liberality. And I confess that I should like to see him in one of his champion games. I believe that I have heard of him."

"I believe so myself," added Harry, with a pleasant laugh. "And honestly, major, don't you think it would be as well to send an ambulance with that gentleman in blue who has been appointed my body-guard? They say familiarity breeds contempt. Some time he will get too close for comfort; and then the conveyance will be needed."

"Come, come! Canter has been all wrong, and borrowed a great deal of trouble, I can assure you. If I could heal up this feud before I go I would feel all the happier. Together the two could do a great deal for the town; and since Mr. Harry has gone into mining I judge that he intends to remain here. For myself, I have been an exile too long. I shall do justice to my girl, and take her where she can see at least a little of a life for which she is better fitted than the lonesome existence she drags out here. After dinner we will talk the matter over, and leave it to Brake as umpire."

When Bartram did espouse a man's cause he was slow to give it up; and perhaps he did not care to be alone with Canter and the major.

The major grew in better humor every moment. It was not necessary to take the words of the sport as an insult; and to tell the truth, the major had been favorably impressed by the appearance of Harry, which was very different from what he expected to see. In any event it might be worth while to have the opportunity to study this cool sport. If he was Captain Cowl, as Canter had so strongly hinted, Brake thought that he would be able to obtain some proof of it in their intercourse during the next

hour. Of course he would not stoop to deceive a man; but in this case Harry had his eyes open, and could not complain if he betrayed himself.

"Don't get excited, Beachcroft. Your guests will get along well enough at your table, and I am willing to be convinced when the time comes that I have been in the wrong—and to apologize, too. Just so we don't trouble you. Soldier's fare will do for all of us."

"Excuse me a moment, then," said Jason, and he hurriedly left the room.

He was only absent for a moment, since he found that his wishes had been anticipated. In half an hour the four were seated at table with Miss Blanche to keep them company.

"It is the improbable that always happens," thought Harry. "Last night I would have bet my share in the coming bonanza on a rusty oyster-can against dining to-day with Canter and the major. Wonders are not going to cease with that. Let's see if the colonel will have the nerve to try to wring in Heba's cordial when he thinks he sees a chance."

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## DEATH IN THE CUP.

THERE were four men at the table, each watching the rest without any positive idea of what he expected to see. Yet there was not a table in Hard Pan that day at which there was a party more thoroughly enjoying itself—if looks went for anything. Everybody was more or less brilliant; and Blanche, surprised as she had been at the appearance there of Hurrah Harry, could see that her father had become a different man in the last hour, and was happy, accordingly. She did the honors of the table, so far as they fell to her, with grace; and by her treatment of Major Brake, and partly, perhaps, on account of the resemblance to her mother that he could trace in her face, she quite won his heart.

Canter did not propose to appear like a death's head at the feast, and for the time being was on easy terms even with Harry; while the latter showed how entertaining he could be.

In course of time the dinner was amply discussed, and Miss Blanche withdrew, leaving the gentlemen for a little to their glasses and their cigars.

A few moments later, as Harry sat with a filled glass at his elbow, and the match burning in his fingers to light a cigar, Miss Fanny came in hurriedly to say that there was a man at the door to see him, who said he would only detain him for a moment.

He went, of course, and found that the man was Baby Bunting.

"Excuse me, boss, but ther news was too good ter keep, an' so we brought it in ter share with you. We hev ther old tunnel all cleared out, an' are down ter bed-rock. It's ther biggest thing outen jail, an' you kin gamble on it every day in ther year."

"Good enough, Baby, but I knew that last without telling. Don't let it go any further for the present, if you can help it. To-night I will try and get out to look it over. Run along, now. Tell Lum that if any one tries jumping him, to shoot first, and argue the matter afterward."

Then Harry went back, without a sign in his face that he had just received such comfortable information.

There was nothing that looked secretive in his movements, and yet the sport came so silently, that no one heard him re-enter the room. The three had their heads bent closely together, looking at each other, and speaking in a low, confidential tone. They were not, to all appearance, thinking of anything else; and yet Harry could have sworn that he saw the hand of Colonel Canter straying over a glass that was not his own. Was it the one left by Harry, or was it one that belonged to some one else? Whosever it was, Bartram, in a mechanical sort of way, took the glass, and with his eyes still fixed on Brake, raised it to his lips and drained the contents. By the time that the glass was down again, Harry was at the table, and looking curiously, though discreetly at its bottom. He could not swear to it, yet he thought that he could see a slight sediment.

He took his seat carelessly, and in so doing, was able to push the tumbler to one side beyond the reach of his host. Brake said something to him, and he was at once included in the discussion.

While he talked Harry also thought; and he was careful not to mix his words and his thoughts.

"Let me see. Canter has just seen the whip broken that he used to crack over Bartram; and that may mean a heap more to him than we outsiders think. I'll venture to say that if anything was to happen it would be found that the colonel was in position to take about everything that was grabable—perhaps including the young lady herself. It won't do to expose him now, but his tether is getting mighty short, even if he has the whole United States Army behind him. I wish I knew what the chances are of the dcse operating before I can get a chance to privately furnish the antidote. Gospel truth, Jason. You would be shivering in your boots if you knew



how high I am betting that Canter don't want a muss here on the floor before he leaves. The major can't stay forever, and I hope for an early move."

It seemed as though the major answered to the thought. He drew himself up.

"Beachcroft, I feel more like a Christian today than I ever expected to feel. Honestly, I won't say that I forgive you; for I am not so sure that there is much to call for forgiveness on my part. I have spent a couple very pleasant hours, so you can judge. Now, I want to say good-day to your daughter, and then I must look after my flock. Canter will go with me as I have some matter to talk over with him on the way, but we will see you again—and I hope have the pleasure of meeting Mr. Harry."

Hurrah Harry bowed to the compliment, and was able to refrain from looking at Canter to see how it suited him. He intended to remain, and was careful not to say a word that might detain them. In a much briefer time than he had hoped for the two other guests vanished.

Then, ignoring Blanche, he took Bartram back to the room they had left, looking curiously at him as they went.

Perhaps the colonel had given a dose stronger than he intended; for the sport imagined that he could see already a trace of death in the face before him.

"What is the matter?" he asked, as he closed the door behind them.

"My heart, I suppose. I have been sorely tried to-day," Bartram gasped, as he dropped into a chair. "Perhaps it has been too much for me. Stay by me, and if the worst—happens—don't—let—Canter—"

His last words were gasped rather than spoken; and Harry hesitated no longer. He drew from his inner-pocket the flask that had been placed in his hands by Poncho Poncho.

"Have you confidence in me?" asked the sport, as he measured out what he thought would be the proper dose.

"Ev—ry—con—fidence!"

"Then take this down without winking. It's your only chance. It's a little late; but this is one of those things that come better late than never. Ah!"

Was it too late, or was it just in time? As the dose went fairly down Bartram threw up his hands and fell forward as though he had been shot. On the floor he stretched his full length, and lay as motionless as the dead.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### WITHIN THE GOLDEN STREAM.

"QUITE a serious case," reflected Harry, more troubled than he appeared. "And wouldn't I give a dollar to have the daughter of the stars here to take it off of my hands. All the appearance of heart disease—if I didn't know that Canter's hand had been over his tumbler. Shall I give the alarm, or give the antidote a chance to get in its work? He looks dead, but he is not, by a long sight."

Almost any one else would have called assistance, if only for self-protection; but the sport never borrowed trouble about himself, and he fancied that if there was a chance to pull through, Bartram would sooner save his daughter all alarm for the present.

The event showed his wisdom. The state of syncope was only temporary. Soon a flush came back to the face, the eyelids trembled, breathing began, the limbs strengthened—in less time than Harry could have hoped, the man was all alive.

"What sort of a magician are you?" asked Jason, in a faint tone. "You saw what was coming, and gave me the right thing. Before a doctor could have been summoned I would have been dead. You—you saved my life."

"I reckon I did," answered Harry, dryly, "and my own, by proxy. The less you say about this the better, until you are strong enough to consider it coolly. You do not look like the kind of a man to die from heart disease—and if you keep your eyes open I think you won't—but this was a very close call, all the same. Don't seek to explain anything to your daughter, but try and sleep. I wouldn't wonder if you could do it without rocking. And for the future remember that Hurrah Harry is not the worst sort of a fellow to have on your side of the fence. I will help you to your bed if you say so, and then I must go."

The day had been pretty well spent by this time, and Harry went at once to the Giraffe. He intended to appear at the supper-table, and then try to quietly slip off for a visit to Lum and the bonanza. He did not see anything of the soldier who had been watching, and believed that he had been withdrawn. It was possible that Canter would have some one on the lookout, but he had baffled the spies of the colonel so often that it began to be only ordinary amusement.

It was not altogether what he wanted when he met Major Brake again, but he managed to get away without having manifested any impatience. He told Brake that he had left Bartram somewhat prostrated by the interview, but that he supposed he would be all right by morning. If Canter was curious, Harry thought it might

be as well to leave some information lying loose where it might be found.

In one way or another he managed to consume considerable time, and it was quite dark before he was on the way to the mine.

"Even Lum's bonanza can't stand this sort of wear and tear of shoe-leather," he muttered, as he walked rapidly along. "Really, if this thing is going to keep up I must make an investment in horseflesh. Hurrah, boys! Hands up!"

He halted suddenly, as he saw several dark forms immediately in front, who seemed to be watching him as he approached. His hands filled, even before he spoke; and he would have used his advantage of the drop without hesitation had he seen anything like a movement for a weapon among them.

"Friends we are," said a voice that he hardly recognized, and a figure stepped toward him that was muffled in a cloak.

"I have been waiting for thee. The time is at hand to search for Walter Forbes. These men with me will see that there is no interruption, and be ready to help if there comes a need."

"Bless my soul! It's the daughter of the stars. What have you been doing to yourself? I didn't recognize you or your voice when you first spoke. All right! Count me in on the ground floor. I had other business in view, but that can wait."

"Thou wouldst see how things look in thy bonanza. I can tell thee that the indications could not be better. Thou hast struck an old shaft that was down to pay rock, and then closed, and for years hidden. Looney Lum has had the knowledge of it in his hands for the last year, if he had known how to use it; and every one save thou thought that he was a fool."

"And the man that finds any more of the fool about my pard than there is in the average run of human kind, is welcome to my share in the best thing at Hard Pan. He may talk like a barn-stormer, but he can dig like a miner from 'Wayback. I don't make many mistakes when I shake hands with a man to stay."

"True—and this time it is so much the better for thee. Yet—small blame to Lum—the map would never have been deciphered without thy aid. It has been well for both that you met. But now there is no time for further talk, if thou wouldst find out the fate of the missing young man. I fear not that we will be troubled by any one within the Golden Stream; but the eyes that watch thy motions are curious; and sooner or later they may find thy trail. Thou hast done well with Brake, but Canter still has his ear. I wish thou hadst come sooner. If the soldiers come to the rescue of the Golden Stream before Walter Forbes is found, it may make wild work."

"Let them come. It's only a squadron of cavalry, and some of the ruff-scruff of Hard Pan. A force like that wouldn't be common amusement, when Hurrah Harry is on the war-path, and has the right on his side."

"A braggart ever; and yet generally as good as thy word. The stars themselves know not how to read thee aright. The friends I have with me will be on the lookout, but much I hope that that same squadron of cavalry will keep its distance. There is some one else that may come; and if so, be careful that thou dost not harm her."

"Her! It is a woman, then? What feminine would come wandering here, this time of night? Heba, the Witch, might have the nerve; but for any one save a daughter of the stars, there is less chance for fun than danger."

"It is the test that I had a fancy to make. If Jason Bartram's daughter cares for Walter Forbes, she will be here to-night."

"Good heavens! With half of the town at her back; and the rest a little in advance!"

"Not so. She will be guided by a servant of the stars, who will show her how to walk without being seen. If she comes not, I will know that there is one she cares more for than the man she hath called her lover."

"Then all this will be love's labor lost?"

"Worse than that," responded Poncho Poncho, gloomily. A dark mood dropped on her, and she turned to her companion just as they stood at the door that led into the building at the mouth of the mine.

"I run the risk that thou dost—and much more. If the time comes that my eyes are opened to my folly, it may be more than dangerous for all of us. Still, I am not of the kind to draw back where destiny leads. We will go forward."

Everything seemed strangely silent about the Golden Stream. Harry was trusting to his companion, and yet he could hardly believe that there were no eyes watching him, and no arms ready to bar their progress. He paid no attention to the thinly-veiled threat, but spoke his surprise that the way was so strangely open.

"They sleep well who have drank of Heba's portion. Enough men are here to crush us by sheer weight, but they see nothing, and make no sound. If an earthquake came it would not awaken them."

"Not all dead?" exclaimed Harry, thrilled in spite of himself.

"Not dead, but sleeping. Come."

The door swung open to her touch, and they stood within the roughly-finished room. Men were there, on guard, but their eyes were closed. To show that her words had not been an empty boast, Poncho Poncho spurned one heavily with her foot. The only result was a low sound, between a groan and a grunt.

"To-morrow they will be none the worse, if their heads split not with the pain. And if he is able Canter may call them to a settlement. But the shaft is before thee, and beyond lies the mystery."

The girl took the lantern that was burning on the pine table, and went fearlessly forward. With the handle of the lantern in her teeth, she caught the heavy rope that stretched downward, and hand-under-hand commenced the descent. Without asking how far they had to go, Hurrah Harry followed. The rope was strong enough to hold a dozen.

The shaft proved to be of little depth. Not twenty feet had he gone when the sport found that his feet rested in the cage that was on the lower end of the rope, and that the cage rested on the floor of the tunnel.

"Which way now?" was his query, as he looked around. "You seem to have this thing down fine. There are a couple of tunnels here, and maybe there is no time to waste in fooling around, hunting out the right one."

"I have had a friend inside, to say nothing of that which has been told me by the stars. He knows nothing of Walter Forbes; but he knew which way Canter went when he visited the mine. There has no work been done there since the new drift was started, and the end was walled up, as it was said, to keep out the water that threatened to break in. If we find nothing there, then we have made the mistake of our lives, and Colonel Canter is a more honest man than I thought."

"Haste, then! Something tells me in my bones that the colonel is on the move already."

They lost no more time after that. Along the narrow drift they hurried, until at last they came to the solid wall of stone that seemed to be the end.

The end—perhaps. The hidden door was hardly intended to deceive eyes as sharp as these. It deceived them but a moment. It was well hidden in the side, and when Harry struck it sharply, a voice behind exclaimed:

"Who is there?"

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### CANTER GETS HIS CHANCE AT LAST.

"SOME one in there, and he is very much alive. Can you recognize the gentleman by his voice?" asked Harry, while he drew the lantern over that he might take a better view of what was before him.

"He is a stranger to me also, yet I doubt not it is Walter Forbes. Break the door open, if thou canst. I see thou hast picked thyself up a weapon."

"Stand back a little, and hold the lantern so that I can see. It is made to keep him in, and not us out. A minute will do the work."

And scarcely a minute did it take. Then, in a dark alcove, a cell that scarce gave room for its one occupant to sit upright, they found a man, who was chained to the bare rock.

"Well, old man, and who are you?" asked Harry, as he crowded into the cell. "Pretty tight quarters, but I guess you won't regret them when we get you out."

"Thank the Lord!" exclaimed the man, with a fervor that no pretense could have simulated. "I am Walter Forbes. The villains have had me shut up here for what has seemed years. If I have not gone mad it was because I shut my teeth and swore that I would not until I had vengeance. Who are you that comes to the rescue? A stranger—and I'd call you an angel if I was not afraid that you would laugh at me."

"Go ahead, and call me what you like, though I generally answer to the name of Hurrah Harry. I'll have you loose in a twinkling, and then we must be making tracks out of here. You needn't be too profuse in your thanks to me—they mostly belong to a young lady."

"To Blanche, bless her heart! I might have known that she would move heaven and earth when once I was fairly missed."

"Not exactly Miss Bartram; and yet, after all, you can thank her as the primary cause. It is on her account that we are laboring. Here we are. I reckon you will find yourself pretty weak, but as soon as you can stretch yourself you will begin to gather strength. Lean on me."

Together they came out of the little cell, and found the daughter of the stars waiting for them in the darkness.

"Be quick," she whispered. "There is a movement in the distance. It may be Miss Bartram; but it may be Colonel Canter and more of his gang. This is no place for him to find us."

"Better here than on the road. We can hold the shanty till the cow's horns drop off; and if they crowd me I'll jump his blamed old mine in earnest."

"Soldiers and all?"

"Brake is a reasonable human being, and



won't chip in for Canter and a dozen. If he does—these army officers are mighty keen for promotion, and his senior captain will be rising up to call me blessed when the fun is all over. But if it looks like a surround, you want to get out of this without being seen. It will be no place for a woman, to say nothing of the fact that I don't want you compromised by being seen in these lonesome places about the dreary hour of midnight. Don't you forget it now, for I mean what I say. I will have enough to do to look after this kid and myself. I swear, I believe that he has fainted. I'll skip up the rope and pull you both up. There must be some one with him to hold him in the cage."

Very true it was that Forbes had fainted when he entirely realized the fact of his rescue. Had Harry been alone with him he might have had some trouble in getting him up the shaft. There is a limit to every thing—even to power as magnificent as his.

Very carefully did the sport place Forbes in the hoisting-box. Then he motioned Poncho Poncho to take her place beside him, to hold him from tumbling over the low sides, and then he swung himself upward. To climb that distance was but play for such a man. Before the girl had fairly arranged herself to take care of her charge he was at the top, and calling down to her.

"All right here; how is it down there? Are you ready?"

"Ready here; hoist away!"

It was seldom that less than two men had worked that windlass, but Harry set the ratchet to provide against slips, and then made it spin.

Without warning it suddenly stopped, when but a few turns more would have brought it to the surface.

"Back in a moment!" shouted Harry over his shoulder, and he darted out of the hut.

He had heard the voice of a woman in affright, and the sterner tones of a man.

As he reached the open air he heard other sounds, further away, that told him that a body of men were approaching in haste. Perhaps it would have been as well to have waited to have Walter Forbes to confront these new-comers with.

He did not think of that, however. A hasty glance beyond showed that they were still at some little distance. There was time to turn his undisturbed attention a little nearer.

"Hands up, there, you villain!" shouted Harry, as he leaped into the open and swung the revolver he had drawn before he knew whether it was one man or many that he had against him.

He might have reached the fellow by a snap shot, but that would have been to open the ball with powder and lead, a thing that he did not care to do until the chances looked a great deal more desperate.

The bluff was wasted, or worse. The man was Chet Delain, and Chet was a chief when the occasion demanded it. His hand had already closed on Blanche's arm, and by a sudden swing he brought her in front of him while his own revolver appeared above her shoulder.

He took hasty aim at the man that was springing toward him, and pulled the trigger.

As a rule Delain aimed low. Perhaps that had something to do with his failure, at a time when failure was most dangerous. The bullet pierced Harry's hat, clipping a lock of hair as it went through, but the sport was unharmed.

There was no time for another shot. Hurrah Harry had already dropped his revolver back into its holster. With his left hand he brushed Blanche away from between them, and with his right he struck just as hard as he could drive.

There was the sudden snap, as of a broken bone, and Chet Delain fell back in a heap without even a groan. Without a second look at him Harry caught up Blanche, ran back with her a pace or two, and tossed her into the building. Then he turned and faced the crowd that was already perilously near, if they were coming to work his death.

"Hold hard there, all of you!" he shouted. "Keep your distance till I know who you are and what is wanted or I'll open fire."

Hard Pan knew but little about his shooting, but the chances were that it was gilt edge. At the hail the rush wavered, and came to a halt. There was a reinforcement just at hand that it might be as well to wait for.

For prudence sake, or because he did not run as well as he once did, Colonel Canter was not with this first flight. He was right behind it, and when it halted he came up.

"Down with him!" was his fierce cry. "He has his gang behind him, and they have killed our men, and are jumping the Golden Stream. Shoot, you cowards, shoot! There lies the corpse of Chet Delain, now!"

"Suppose you do your own shooting; and let some one else do the talking. I'll meet you with any weapon known to mankind, at any distance, and give you all the start you ask for!" shouted back Harry, as he saw that the men hesitated to obey the order. He knew not what was going on in the building, but hoped to give Walter Forbes time to recover sufficiently to tell his story if it should prove that there were any men before him who would listen to it. Otherwise,

with such odds to face it might—it would—go hard with him.

And this was what Colonel Canter did not intend to allow. At last he had his enemy where he wanted him, and whatever might come to light afterward his slaughter could never be held as a crime.

"If you want to talk throw up your hands, and we will give you a chance for prayers and confession when the rope is around your neck. You have done your last murder in Hard Pan. Surrender, or we fire!"

Hastily he whispered an order to two or three men who stood near him, and at once they edged away, to take him on the flank.

"Yes, surrender!" exclaimed another voice. "We will have no more foolishness here till we see if Captain Cowl is not at the bottom of it. Ready, present, aim!"

A squad of dismounted cavalry was in the swim, along with the rest, and the officer in charge meant business, since he saw things as they looked, and not as they were.

"Fire!" shouted Canter, and this time there was a stunning crash as half a dozen guns went off together, and a woman's flitting figure suddenly swept between Hurrah Harry and—death.

Clasping the woman in his arms just as he had seized her to fling her aside, Harry went down.

Then, in the silence that followed, every one could hear the hard galloping of several horses, and the voice of Major Brake, as he shouted:

"Not another shot there! Stevens, keep the peace! It is all a mistake!"

#### CHAPTER XXXVII.

HARRY HAS THE CHANCE TO WIN HIS BET.

It was chance—and Fanny French—that brought the major on the scene when he was needed most. Fanny had discovered that Miss Bartram had followed a certain mysterious messenger, and was going to visit the Golden Stream. If she could have found Blanche's father at once she might have had her stopped, or a reliable escort furnished. When it turned out that he was not in the house, and some little time had been lost looking for him, she sought him elsewhere, and found him with Major Brake.

A few hasty words as to the conversation she had overheard sent the major and Edwin Beachcroft to the rescue.

They came a shade late, but there was an escort following them, and the soldiers already on the ground gave the major a force not to be despised; and Hard Pan, having seen the sport fall, was willing to halt. There was one thing they had not seen. The knowledge of it was to come afterward.

The major sprung from his horse in the midst of them all, as a man who looked like a ghost, supported on the arm of a woman, came staggering out from the doorway in front of which Hurrah Harry had fallen.

"For Heaven's sake, men!" he huskily shouted, "listen to me before you fire another shot!"

"It is Walter Forbes!" exclaimed Bartram—or Beachcroft, as the reader now knows him. "He has my daughter under his charge. There has been foul play of some kind. Listen to the truth. I have as much in the Golden Stream as any two men in the town, and I say it is all a mistake, and that there is no cause for this."

"Unless it be to hang that infernal hound, Colonel Canter," exclaimed Forbes. "Where is he? Bring him forward that I may tell to his face the story of the damnable treatment I have had at his hands."

"Canter. Where is he?"

There were some honest men in the crowd, and they raised the cry.

A man who was sitting on the ground, and holding the head of a dying woman in his lap, heard the cry and raised his head.

"Right over there you will find the hound," he said, pointing with his disengaged hand.

"I fired as I fell, but I never miss my aim. You will find him all in a heap, and very dead."

Then he bent downward again, and listened to the words that the dying woman whispered into his ear.

And so, while Walter Forbes told to the crowd the story that the reader already understands, the daughter of the stars whispered hers to Hurrah Harry.

"I told thee once that henceforth our lives would run together; but I thought not then that mine had so short a time to run. It was my madness; yet when it is once written who can alter? I who never saw man before whose life to me was worth a pin, gave my life to thee even at our first meeting. Perhaps it was not so strange. Never was there another like to thee. Oh, thou art a man among all men, and I had hoped to win thee for my own. For thee only I let myself be seen as few had ever seen me—as a girl of beauty, yet with such courage as might attract a man like thee. Had I not known it could not be I would have sworn thou hadst woven some spell, given me some drug. How didst thou do it?"

"Hush, hush, little woman! You will lose the little chance you have. I wove no spell—we came to each other as springtime and roses. Heaven knows, if I could have saved thy life at the cost of my own, how freely I would have done it. Why did you throw yourself in the

way of the bullets that could not harm me if my time had not yet come? If I had only known that thou wert coming I would have saved this sacrifice, that must ever through life be a haunting sorrow."

Unconsciously to himself he fell into her way of speech, and his tones grew very tender, as he noted her labored breathing.

"Thou knowest as well as I that there is no chance for me to live. It is but a matter of minutes. Yet, before I go, it is better to tell thee the whole truth. I want no sad memories or haunting sorrows. Dost remember our first meeting?"

"In the saloon, when I gave that ruffian a lesson? Yes."

"No. Before that?"

"Never."

"Yes. When thou wert sitting by the roadside, and I gave into thy hands a thousand dollars to start thee against the world once more. What man would have done so wild a thing as that?"

"Then—heavens! I have thought there was something familiar. There was a strangely-leaden hue about the face—such disguise might be. And if so—thou art—"

"Captain Cowl! Thou canst still win thy bet, since within the three weeks thou canst bring him, dead, to Hard Pan."

"Not for ten thousand times the wager! If this thing be true I need not tell you that the secret dies with you—so far as my knowledge goes."

"I know not if I will rest the better, but I would fain have it so. It is the truth I tell thee. I would not lie to thee, dying. I am Captain Cowl, and Heba, the Witch of the Knob. I was bred to it. My father was a bandit, when he was not a rebel general in the everlasting revolutions that disgraced Mexico. His band was his legacy, and I have used it for what it was worth. Those who knew me as I was, died long since, and to most of those who have obeyed my orders of late, I have been Captain Cowl, and nothing else. I was nothing more to Colonel Canter, who was a sleeping partner, and was very ready with his schemes. He was with me when thou first met me, and it was a wager that I made with him as to thy success in Hard Pan that laid the foundation of all the enmity with which he has since pursued thee. I am glad thy weapon laid him low. He was a traitor at heart. Other men in the camp have followed as I winked; but I betray them not, even to thee. If they could not understand Poncho Poncho, small blame to them. Of late she could not understand herself. If I had lived, and all gone well, I would have died before I would have told thee these things, but I can give thee all the truth now. It can make no difference. Perhaps I would have slain thee. Who knows? I could never have seen thee go to another. I thought once that you might care for this milk-faced daughter of Bartram's. Better had I let the test alone. Hold me closer. They are coming to gaze on me. I am growing very weak. Who would have thought that the man-woman, the woman without mercy, the woman who hated man, and sneered at love, should die in her lover's arms? But, so it goes. We who read the stars know least of all what is to befall us."

In all his strange life no such strange thing as this had ever happened to Harry. The woman ceased speaking, but she looked up into his eyes like an affectionate tiger, and there was a strange smile on her blue lips. As Blanche and Walter Forbes, with others in their train, came crowding up at last to give thanks, aid, pity, anything and everything that was in their power, she turned her face inward toward Harry's breast, and there she died.

The explanation that Walter Forbes and others gave had set Harry right with the crowd, and had it not been that he kept closely by the body of her who was only known in Hard Pan as Poncho Poncho, the daughter of the stars, he would have been escorted back to the town in triumph.

And as to the future as it was then, the past as it is now, is it not all written in the Hard Pan chronicles? How Looney Lum prospered, and the bonanza was a fixed fact and a paying institution; how Walter Forbes became the manager of the Golden Stream, after he had married the daughter of the man who was still known as Jason Bartram, and who did not go East after all; how Pedro Mercator closed up his business and left, greatly regretted by a sorrowing community; how Jem Hudson accumulated much wealth, and grew mighty in flesh; how many of the minor ruffians died with their boots on, and a few, like Baby Bunting, turned over a new leaf; how Major Brake got a great deal of satisfaction, and very little trace of Captain Cowl; and how, at last accounts, Hurrah Harry, still prospering, had quit cards and was more attentive than ever to Miss Fanny French, who was really a young lady with a mystery, and quite above her seeming station.

All these things are down in black and white; but it is universally admitted that the highest of all high times at Hard Pan were the few days following the hour when Hurrah Harry struck the town.

THE END.



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